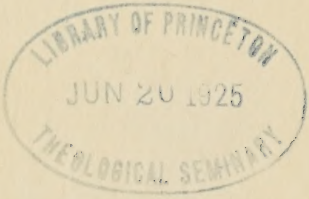

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What I believe and why I
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WHAT I BELIEVE
AND WHY I BELIEVE IT

BY THE
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COMMENDATION

IT gives me pleasure to say a few words of commendation of Mr. Beibitz's new work. As one who read and I hope profited by his previous book *Belief, Faith, and Proof,* I was glad to be allowed to see in manuscript form the book which is now presented to the public.

Many in these days seem to assume that the arguments for the Christian Faith have been overthrown by scientific inquiry, and that nothing more can be said. Many others with good reason find themselves dissatisfied with the old arguments which were sufficient for the intellectual needs of a hundred years ago ; but are at a loss to find a suitable substitute. A thoughtful restatement of outstanding principles of Christian belief is here expressed in modern terms without technical or abstruse language. I venture to hope that this little book will be found widely useful both by laymen and by candidates for Holy Orders. The argument is clear and candid. The appeal is made to reason and to Holy Scripture. I should be glad to think that Mr. Beibitz's book will have many readers.

(*Signed*) HERBERT E. RYLE, Bp.

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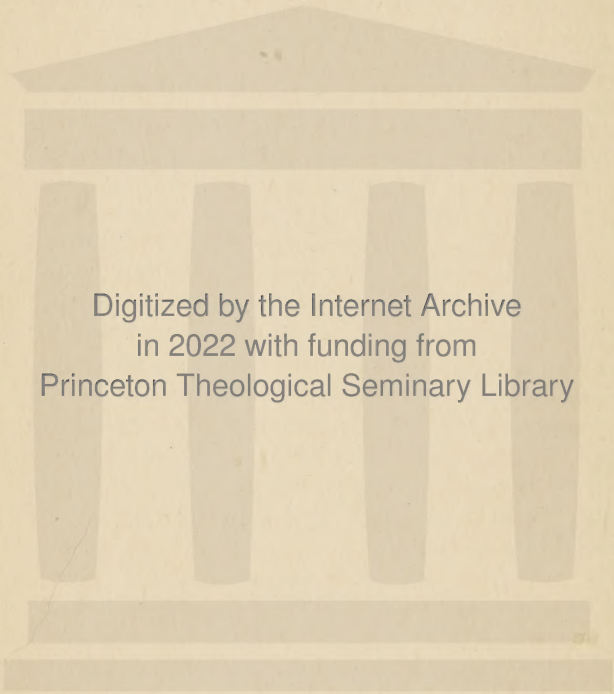
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INTRODUCTION

SO far as I can trace the origin of this book, it is due to the remark of a friend, who has many opportunities of observation and uses them, to the effect that people no longer believe in their religion in the same way as their fathers did. Whether this be generally the case or not, I think that we are in the presence of a certain falling off in regard to religious convictions, and, still more, of a widespread haziness of mind as to what Christians really believe, and the grounds on which those beliefs rest. It, therefore, seemed worth while to try to state the main outlines of the Christian position in as simple and untechnical way as possible. For the statement of that position is, I believe, its best defence. Far more unbelief is owing to a diffused atmosphere of vagueness and uncertainty than to reasoned doubt. The man who is too busy with 'practical' concerns to afford much time for study, has often the impression that the old religion, in which he was brought up, has been somehow discredited by modern criticism and research, and is not sure how much is left upon which he can rely. The aim of what follows is to show that this idea is groundless. Critical questions are not indeed here discussed, for that would have been to defeat the purpose of this book, which is intended not for the theologian but for the 'plain man.' But also, I trust, they have not been shirked. The standpoint taken is not that we may ignore such things, but that

we may fearlessly accept the more assured and agreed-on results of modern study, and find in these a help towards a more rational, but not less assured faith. This book, again, makes no pretence to completeness. Many problems are passed over, or simply glanced at. For, as is indicated by its title, it is written from a more or less personal point of view, and in the hope that a line of thought which is helpful to the writer, may also be of some assistance to others, in the strengthening or recovery of belief.

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What I believe and why I believe it

CHAPTER I

THE PRESENT STATE OF RELIGION

IT is often said, that one of the most distressing signs of the times in which we are living, is the evident, if gradual, decay of religious belief. Such, at least, is the opinion of some of our closest observers of contemporary life. If this be true, then we cannot regard the fact with indifference. For no worse misfortune could befall a nation than to lose its hold upon the great realities of the spiritual world. Compared with such a loss, defeat by a foreign enemy, internal strife, complete economic ruin, would be, by comparison, insignificant evils. For the greatest asset of a nation is the national character, and this depends upon, although it is more than the mere sum of, the characters of the men and women who compose the nation. A nation can survive, and at length emerge triumphant from, every imaginable calamity save the loss of moral character. And, in spite of all that has been said to the contrary, this character is dependent, ultimately, on the preservation of religious belief, if such belief be of the kind which involves worthy and noble conceptions of God, and of man's nature and destiny.

For, in the end, right conduct is that which is determined by right motives controlling and directing those instincts which, as we are now being taught by our psychologists, are the deep and often hidden springs of our life. And right motives are such as are founded on right views of the meaning of the world in which we live, and of the part we play therein. Conduct depends upon, character is shaped by, our beliefs as to the ultimate truths which underlie all existence.

Whether we are trying to determine a line of action for ourselves, or to educate children in morality, we are bound sooner or later to come up against the questions: 'Why should I do right?' 'Why am I not to seek the greatest amount of pleasure, or what appears to me to be such?' 'Why should I take thought for others?' I do not see how, from the barely moral standpoint, we can answer such questions, whether put to us by others, or arising in our own minds. At the very least, we are led to an enlightened and prudent selfishness, or to a morality which, after all, has no foundation in reason. People with the best intentions, who try to inculcate perfectly admirable lessons on good citizenship, or the importance of the qualities which make up the character of the good citizen, without reference to any kind of religious belief, are forgetting the absolutely disintegrating power of moral scepticism. Their house, beautiful and of noble proportions, constructed of the best material, is founded on the sand. Let us be fair. There are many influences which mould character—heredity, social environment including example, lessons impressed on the mind at the age when it is most open to impressions coming from without, and is most retentive of them. All this is

common knowledge. But in the long run, no merely moral foundation can stand the shock of violent temptation or the assault of inward scepticism. Such stable and secure foundation as we desire for others or ourselves, can only be furnished by faith, by some conviction, that is, of the spiritual or ultimate meaning of the universe, and of human life.

In three ways faith supplies to morality this indispensable basis. I call it indispensable in the sense that it alone can enable morality to withstand the assaults of temptation or of scepticism as to its obligation.

(i) It supplies a sanction in the shape of rewards and punishments. This is its lowest function. It may certainly be objected that the conduct which results is not truly moral, but only, as was said above of some kinds of non-religious morality, a prudent and calculating selfishness. If this were the sole function of faith in this connection, such a criticism would be abundantly justified. But it is very questionable if his religion means only this to any religious man. And, for all that has been recently said to the contrary, the idea of retributive justice, the idea, namely, that ill-doing ought to involve suffering, is a profoundly moral one. In a future state, we can, I think, imagine ourselves as actually experiencing satisfaction in enduring suffering which we feel to be deserved. And the 'fear of the Lord' of which even a Christian Apostle speaks, is not a non-moral fear, not simply dread of punishment, or a cowardly and craven spirit. It is rather the fear of offending One Who is absolutely just and perfectly holy, combined with a sense of personal shortcoming. It is the kind of fear which the Hebrew prophet describes as his first impression

when he received a vision of the Most Holy. 'Then said I, woe is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.' And, on the other hand, the idea of reward, in the case of Christianity at least, is far removed from the idea of sensuous contentment. It is, rather, the thought of a perfect, or relatively perfect, attainment of the fruition of our moral strivings, of escape from our manifold imperfections. The Christian view of heaven is this: 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

(ii) Ascending to a higher level, we find that the Christian religion supplies a motive to morality which not only tends to its security, but actually raises or even transforms the idea of morality itself. That motive is the love of One Who is believed to be God, and yet to have lived as Man among men, and to have borne suffering and death for all men. 'The love of Christ constraineth us, judging this, that one died on behalf of all, so then all died: and He died on behalf of all that they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to Him Who on their behalf died and rose again.' Where this love is present, the love of the unseen yet ever-present Friend of humanity, it tends to produce, and has in fact produced in numberless cases all down the Christian ages, a new kind of emotion, which Professor Seeley has named 'the enthusiasm of humanity.' This was one of the earliest discoveries made by Christians who tried to analyse the effects of the new religion on themselves, and is thrown by S. Paul into the form of a general principle. 'Love is the fulfilment of the law.' This is not, of course, to

deny the existence of a genuine philanthropy in pre-Christian times, and outside the Christian Church. Nor is it meant to assert that all Christians have at all times acted up to the ideal. In fact, it is only a commonplace to say that we have fallen miserably short of it. But the ideal has never been altogether lost sight of, and has exercised a powerful influence, sometimes an unconscious influence, on the civilization of the Western world. To take one example only, and that perhaps not the best that could be chosen. The events of the Great War, however profoundly discouraging to those who trusted in the moralizing efforts of 'civilization' or the onward march of physical science, have yet, on the other hand, revealed the existence of a conscience which condemns war as the infliction of endless suffering on human beings. This feeling would appear to be the outcome of Christian influence working through long years unconsciously and indirectly, and most certainly, could not be even imagined as existing at any time in the world's history before the appearance of Jesus Christ. The finest fruits of this distinctively Christian spirit are to be seen, as we should expect, in individuals, in a S. Francis or a Father Damien, a Wilberforce or a Howard. But the great mass of believers has never been altogether untouched by it. And, after all, the religion of Christ is yet in its early youth, if we consider the vast period of time that human beings have existed on earth. Our present point is this, that here we have religion serving indeed as a foundation of the moral life, but even still more, raising morality itself to a higher level, and causing it to assume the highest form of which it is capable, the very likeness of a love which is both human and divine. 'Ye shall therefore be

perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.' And the context shows plainly what kind of perfection is meant. It is the perfection of a love that can overcome the sentiment of hatred, and can love even those who have most grievously wronged us. Now the unconscious and indirect influence of the Christian spirit depends upon its conscious working in each age in a greater or less number of individuals, and this conscious working of it is impossible, and indeed inconceivable, apart from belief in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no doubt at all that, in the last resort, Christian morality is utterly and entirely dependent upon the Christian faith.

(iii) In a third way, and in a still more fundamental sense, religious belief serves as a strengthening and a support to our moral life. Even the best of us, perhaps, can hardly help sometimes asking ourselves 'Why should I do right?' Various schools of moralists, as is well known, are distinguished from each other largely by the various answers which they give to this question. But I do not think that any of these answers, even if he knows them, have much effect on the actual morality of the average man. There is, however, one answer which, if rightly understood, is both satisfying to the intelligence and invigorating to the will—a moral and intellectual tonic. It is this: I should do right because it is the will of God. Of course, like most other statements, this one is capable of being misinterpreted. As a matter of fact it has been seriously misunderstood in two ways. The will of God, in the first place, has been taken to be an arbitrary will, so that that which is right is right simply because God wills it, although He might in fact have willed

something else. This is a most grave error. Even in the case of man, we cannot isolate his will from the rest of his nature, as if it were a separate thing which happened to belong to him, instead of being a name for himself as active, purposeful, striving to attain self-satisfaction by the attainment of some end. Much less can we apply such a conception to the undivided, perfectly harmonious nature of God. His will is the expression of His nature or being as active. He cannot will that which is contrary to His perfect holiness and love. That which is right is that which is in accord with His nature. The being of God is that which we mean by righteousness, holiness, love. There can be, with Him, no such thing as an arbitrary will. That is, if the case could be imagined of our having perfect knowledge of His nature, that would include knowledge of all His actions from all eternity. This is the perfect ideal of freedom, not the being free from all restraints, but always acting in accordance with one's true nature. To this freedom we can only approximate, according to the measure of our moral growth. Thus 'I should do that which is right because God wills it' means I should do the right because righteousness is that which corresponds to the very nature and being of God, and therefore to my own true nature and being. It is involved in the meaning of manhood made in His image.

Again, the meaning of goodness as that which is willed by God is obscured sometimes by our thinking of God too much 'in the likeness of a man.' We shall find a later occasion to speak of the doctrine of His personality. The error to which I refer is that of regarding God as if He were a 'person' in our own limited sense of the word, one of the count-

less millions of persons in the universe, even if He be, at the same time, the cause of existence to all other persons. It is difficult to express the truth without falling into the opposite error of pantheism, which simply identifies God with the sum of all existence. But we must think of Him as the ever-present ground of all existence and all reality. He is more than the universe, but the universe exists in Him. 'In him we live and move and have our being.' From this point of view 'I should do right because God wills it' acquires a yet deeper meaning. I am to 'seek righteousness' because righteousness is not only the ideal of my own true nature, and the meaning of my manhood, but also the fundamental law and meaning of the universe.

These three considerations do, I think, prove the very close connection which exists between religious belief and morality. Even at the risk of repetition, I would desire to make the exact point clear. We do not assert that all moral persons are Christians in their belief, or even have, necessarily, any sort of belief at all. But this surely is most clear, that faith, and in an especial degree the Christian faith, supplies the strongest motive and the surest foundation of the moral life. Such faith, and, so far as one is able to see, such faith alone, can supply a convincing answer to the question of moral scepticism, 'Why should I do right?' There is some reason to fear that this moral scepticism is fairly widely spreading among ourselves, and that this sad fact is directly in some cases, indirectly in others, connected with the spread of a somewhat hazy and but little reasoned kind of unbelief.

We are brought back to the point from which we started. The asserted decay of religious belief, if

and so far as it is a fact, is a most alarming feature of our life of to-day. For it would be the herald of the most appalling of all calamities which can befall a nation, the slow but certain degradation of the national character.

There are not wanting signs, as we have hinted, that at least some measure of truth underlies the assertion. Statistics of attendance at places of worship are indeed not altogether satisfactory as a test. Yet we cannot, in this connection, disregard the appallingly low proportion of the numbers of our congregations to the total number of our population. Even more significant is the total indifference of the majority, as I fear we must say, in all classes, as to whether their children receive definite religious instruction of any kind or not. Nor can we put aside the alarming increase, since the war, of crimes of violence and the prevalence of a lax standard of morality.

What we need, above all things, is the creation of a strong, intelligent, reasoned faith in the Christian creed, a faith which shall be able to give an account of itself.

In the absence of such a faith, which has been disciplined by the facing of doubt, lies, I am convinced, the secret in no small measure of our present difficulties. The cause of the present unsettlement of the minds of men who think, has been traced with admirable clearness and fullness by Bishop Gore in the first chapter of *Belief in God*, a chapter which should be read and re-read. But there is yet another cause of the decay of religious faith. And that is, the wide prevalence of a hazy, conventional type of belief. So many people have neither time, nor inclination, nor the requisite training to examine for themselves

the problems which arise out of modern science or criticism. Definite objections to the faith springing from such sources have not arisen above their mental horizon. But they have a vague and disquieting sense that such attacks have been made. And this sense has acted disastrously on their spiritual life. They know not what they are to believe or disbelieve. And in fact, they did not start out on life's adventure with any clear idea of the faith at all. They are Christians, more or less, because their fathers and mothers were before them. Any assault on any statement, whether defensible or not, which they have ever been taught, appears to them to shake, if not to overturn, the whole edifice. Is it any cause for wonder that so misty a belief easily vanishes into nothingness? They have never believed, only believed that they believed, which is quite a different thing.

If we desire, then, to counteract the present tendency towards a hazy scepticism, as hazy in fact as the state of quasi-belief which preceded it, we need a definite statement, in modern language, of what we ought to believe, and our grounds for believing it.

The present book is a humble attempt to furnish something of this kind. It is not an endeavour to grapple with detailed problems which involve a knowledge, say, of modern philosophy, or of Biblical criticism. This task has been already splendidly done, in the book just referred to and in others. It is meant to be ' popular ' in one sense of that much abused word, that is, to appeal to and interest those who have not the time for special studies, and are perhaps unfamiliar with the technical terms of theology or philosophy. Its aim is to set out the

Faith as it appeals to an average mind and the reasons which that same mind has for accepting that Faith.

It is therefore intended to be practical rather than academic. For every mind must face the question 'What am I to believe in regard to the meaning and destiny of human life, and, in particular, of my own life?' There is an answer given to the question, in the Christian Creed. What are the grounds for believing that answer to be true?

There is yet another question which goes deeper still. 'If I, by inheritance and to some extent inclination, call myself a Christian, do I in fact believe?' I am sure there is but one way of answering that. It consists in asking one's self another question: 'What effect has this belief, or what I have taken to be such, on my life?' For no statement, in the Bible or out of it, is more full of common sense than that of S. James, that faith can only be shown by works, by the actual effects it produces in the life of the man who says or thinks that he has it. And S. Paul, who is so often supposed to contradict him, equally speaks of 'faith working through love.'

Belief and practice, intellect and will, are in our nature inseparably intertwined. To believe in God is to be trying to serve Him, and to be trying to serve God is at any rate implicit faith. But I shall believe with more assurance, I shall serve more whole-heartedly, if I can gain a clearer idea of what my religion does teach, and why I, as no trained theologian, but a sensible and reasoning man, give my personal assent to that which it teaches.

To substitute a clear idea for a hazy one, both of the Faith and its grounds, is the aim of what follows. For so, even in one or two minds, that nightmare of

'the decay of religious belief' may be dispelled. And if this, by the spread of religious conviction, could be done for many minds, the greatest danger which threatens our national life would be, in that measure, averted.

CHAPTER II

BELIEF IN GOD. NATURE

CLEARLY, we must begin with the first and fundamental article of our faith, belief in God. And here we have at once to reckon with what we have already noted as one of the causes of the decay of religious belief, the prevalent haziness of the mental attitude of the ordinary man who attends his place of worship, indeed, but has never clearly thought out what his religion actually means. It has been well said, that the essential thing is not so much belief in God, as the kind of God in whom one believes. Is the popular belief a great advance on that of our childhood's days, when we thought of Him as an immensely magnified man, somewhere above the clouds, at an incredible distance from us? And as to the general conception of His character, there appears a tendency to oscillate between the two extremes of a good-natured, somewhat weak person, who will in the end make everything all right for every one: and an entirely arbitrary and despotic power or fate governing our lives. It is quite obvious that ideas of this kind are peculiarly liable to be upset or unsettled, not only by direct attacks of scepticism, but by a kind of vague feeling that such attacks, of which the grounds have not been examined or understood, have been more or less successful.

Hence we need to come face to face with the

question, what is really meant by believing in God? If we only mean by that, the belief that among all the millions of beings in the universe there is One somewhere or other, whom we call God, that seems to me a poor sort of faith; and it is exactly against this kind of faith that popular scepticism is directed. I think we should take up a very different attitude, and say that what we mean by God is not one individual among a multitude of individuals, but the Supreme Reality which is the ground of any sort of existence or reality at all. We should thus not be inventing anything new, but entering into S. Paul's grand thought of God, 'In whom we live and move and have our being.' And this is not—here we have to be very careful—to identify God with the universe, but to hold that the universe has its ground, its very being, in a vast spiritual existence, in a mind, a will which includes all things, is present in all things, and gives to all things whatever share of reality each possesses. All that, and nothing short of that, is the meaning of that brief but tremendous phrase, 'I believe in God.'

But the truth is so tremendous, that we should be zealously careful to find out the reasons which warrant our belief in it. For the whole of our life is here at stake. Nothing can make so profound a difference to all a man's ways of thinking and acting, when he exchanges what has been perhaps a merely conventional belief, or assent to a statement in which he takes but little interest, for a genuine personal conviction in the reality of God.

And here let me say at once, that while I do believe that He wishes us to use our reasoning powers to the full, there is a deep truth which underlies the old question 'Canst thou by searching find out God?'

For the first step in 'finding out God' comes from Him and not from us. In other words, while the reality of God is in a true sense, to each individual soul, a discovery, it is also, in an even truer sense, a revelation.

Revelation is a word of far wider meaning than that which we usually give to it. It stands for the fact that God discloses Himself to man, gives to man some real knowledge about Himself. And what, I think, we often fail to understand, is the variety of ways and of degrees in which this self-disclosure is made, this knowledge imparted.

I anticipate the objection, 'Are you not begging the question, assuming the very point at issue, namely, the existence of God?' But my argument is this: you can only know, to take a very imperfect illustration, that a person exists, by his manifestation of himself to our senses, his bodily presence, his words, his acts, or if we have never seen him, by some visible effect of them. These things are his revelation of himself. And I now need to show, that the spiritual ground of all existence, whom we name God, has actually revealed, is revealing, Himself to us in similar ways, making all allowances for the infinite difference between Him and finite human persons like ourselves. There is no other method of arriving at the conclusion of the existence or non-existence of God than by examining, to the best of our power, what at any rate claims to be a revelation of Him.

There is another 'begging the question' of which I have been guilty. I have spoken of the source of existence as 'He,' implying what we call 'personality.' And this is implied, too, in the very word 'revelation.' Only a person can reveal himself. The answer is the same. We have to examine that

which claims to be a revelation. If we find good reasons for believing that it really is such, then the Source of existence must be in some sense personal, in other words, God, and not an impersonal force or energy. All religion is at stake in this. For religion implies a personal relationship, intercourse, communion, and this is only possible between persons. I am not here denying that the attitude of awe and reverence with which the agnostic may regard the universe, has a truly religious character, more so than that of many a conventional church-goer or so-called 'believer.' But about this two remarks may be made. Such an attitude, religious as we must truly call it, falls short of the fullness of religious experience. And, logically, it may perhaps be questioned whether it can be justified, except by regarding the universe as somehow personal. I mean, the feeling of reverence would seem to convey with it a recognition, unconscious it may be, of a Personal Presence. 'There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds' is a profound truth. May there not be a faith of feeling, that is implanted deeper in a man than his intellect, and which may exist even when the intellect refuses to accept that faith? It would lead us too far astray from our subject to follow out that suggestion. I give it for what it is worth.

If we want to ascertain the truth about God, we must consider, in the first place, that kind of evidence which is open to every man, namely the physical universe into which he is born. Does that natural world tell us anything beyond itself? S. Paul believed that it did. 'The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even His

eternal power and Godhead.' If this be true, then nature is a revelation of God, and of His methods of self-disclosure to man.

I do not propose here to consider the various 'proofs' of the existence of God which have been based upon the natural world and the constitution of man's mind. I would only call attention to three outstanding features of that world, which indicate, it appears to me very clearly, that it has a spiritual source. These three features are order, beauty, and purpose.

1. ORDER. The world in which we live is an orderly world. We can count upon the regular sequence of events. Even where we are unable, at present at any rate, to detect order, we assume that such exists, as, for example, in the case of the weather. And this assumption, is a proof of the constant orderliness of the universe as a whole, because it has been forced upon our minds by the innumerable instances of order with which we are acquainted. Apart from such a conviction, ordinary life, the daily conduct of our business in the world, would be impossible. We are ever acting in the present, and making plans for the future, in the belief that nature will not fail us, and this trust is never found to be misplaced. And, it is needless to say, the whole vast fabric of the natural sciences is based upon the same trust. We are so accustomed to regularity and order, to the faith that, given the same conditions, the same effect will follow upon the same cause, that our minds are dulled to the exceeding wonder of it. We never think of asking ourselves, at least when we have grown out of childhood, why the world we know should be what it is, a system upon which we can count, and not an

entirely arbitrary and random jumble of events. Yet this question leads us very far into the secret heart of the universe. If we consider carefully what it involves, we shall come to the conclusion that mind is enthroned in the heart of the universe, that nature is a system which is, if we may be allowed the expression, saturated with mind. For mind and order go together. Why is it that we can enter into the author's meaning when we read a book? It is because a mind like our own has arranged the letters and words into an intelligible order. We could attach no meaning at all to a purely accidental arrangement of the letters.

And nature, as we know it—and as the very condition of our knowing it at all—in this respect resembles the printed page. We find meaning in it, quite sufficiently clearly to enable us to carry on the normal conduct of life. So does the man of science, though he can read many more pages in that book than we can. Even where we cannot find out the meaning, nevertheless we assume that there is a meaning there, precisely as we should do if we were confronted with a book written in a language which we did not understand. It would never occur to us to say, here or there, in this department of nature or in that, there is no meaning at all. The two cases, nature and the printed book, are analogous. In both, mind is the cause of order, and order yields meaning to the other mind or minds which study it. In this sense, it cannot be denied that nature is the revelation of mind, of a mind like our own, although of infinitely vaster range and capacity.

2. BEAUTY. We are all of us susceptible, some of us, who, as we say, possess the artistic sense, very

keenly susceptible, of the many beautiful aspects of nature. It is, fortunately, not necessary for our purpose that we should enter upon the difficult question of what is exactly meant by beauty, or our sense of it. It is quite sufficient to take for granted, without any further analysis, the undoubted existence of something which we recognize as beautiful, and of the feeling which can, to a greater or less degree, appreciate it, and to consider what is implied in such existence. And directly we come to think steadily about this, we discover a fact which never strikes the unreflecting person, which would not strike us, without much careful thought, yet which we recognize as undeniable and indisputable fact. And the fact is just this, that beauty is not a physical, but a mental thing. No better illustration of this can be found than in what all acknowledge to be one of the most beautiful aspects which nature presents to us, namely, a fine sunset. Physically, all we have here is a collection of innumerable minute particles floating in the air, and refracting light. Mentally, we have a vivid impression of beauty. If beauty then exists only in mind, and for mind, we seem led to the conclusion that, as in our own case, so in nature, there is a mind in which the idea of beauty exists, and which is capable of creating the same idea in other minds. Nature is beautiful not, so to speak, as lifeless and mindless, but in virtue of a vast mind which underlies it, and reveals itself to our minds through a physical medium.

3. Purpose. We are not going to discuss here the scientific theory of evolution, and the various forms through which it has passed. Elsewhere I have endeavoured to give a brief sketch of the reasons for accepting it, in its broad outlines, as true. And,

of course, there are many scientific treatises to which we may refer, in which the arguments are set out at length. Here I would ask leave to assume its truth, and to consider what is involved in the view of nature as an age-long process of development, culminating, as far as we are concerned, in the appearance of man upon this planet. If this be the case, if, that is, we have a long chain, beginning with some microscopic form of life, and issuing in a being gifted with intelligence, with moral and spiritual capacities, then I fail to see how any explanation is at all tenable, except one in terms of purpose. For it is a well-known and sound principle, that in any sort of process, the beginning must be interpreted in the light of the end, and not vice versa. The lower stages become, for the first time, intelligible, in the light cast back upon them by the higher stages. Take what is perhaps rather a puerile illustration. If one had never seen a house, the earliest operations of the builders would be meaningless. They would only become intelligible in the light of the finished product, and the knowledge of the use to which it could be put. Or, an example nearer the mark, the microscopic cell which is the beginning of the life of any of the higher plants or animals, and the first stages of its growth, only become explicable when the final stage, the adult organism, is reached. If we are true to this principle, we must say that the idea of man was in some sense present when the earliest stage in the evolution of living forms began. But if present, how, and when? An idea can only be present in a mind. The idea of an end, and of the steps by which that end is reached, implies not merely intelligence, but purposive intelligence. This is the baldest summary of a long and elaborate argument.

But, however one may explain it, the most tolerable view of nature is that which represents it as the scene in which some great purpose is working towards an end foreseen.

Nature, then, is the revelation of mind, a mind to which its order is due, a mind which is creative and appreciative of beauty, a mind which is purposive and directive.

Is this the same thing as saying that nature is the revelation of God? If we qualify this statement a little, and say that it is a partial revelation of Him, inadequate but real as far as it goes, that He does make Himself known to some degree in the physical order, as indwelling mind and purpose, I think that this statement is certainly true.

And I believe it to be true for this reason. We cannot think of a mind and purpose which is the mind and purpose of no one at all, which are, so to speak, unattached, attributed in some vague way to the general source of things. That is a view some hold, which is known as pantheism. It is, according to this idea, the universe to which mind and purpose belong, the universe which is God. In that case, everything which is bad and ugly, as well as all that is good and beautiful, equally belong to God, and equally show what He is. That is the stock argument against pantheism, and I do not see how it is going to be refuted. But that is not our point now. If we discover mind anywhere, we conclude the existence of a person whose mind it is, to whom it belongs. 'Mind' is what we call an abstraction, it is a part of a living whole which we have separated from the rest, in order to consider it at our leisure. But mind has no existence by itself, it is just the name for the thinking activity of a person. And so

we can say that nature does reveal God, or, as I would rather put it, that nature is one of the ways in which God reveals Himself to us.

It is this belief in God, in the supreme Personal Mind and Will, which lies at the foundation of all religion. As religious people, or people who want to be religious, we have no sort of use for a pantheistic view of the universe, as if God was merely a name for the sum of all things that are. And if we stand by this, what is it that we mean, exactly, by a personal God? Not, surely, that He is limited, as an individual human person is limited, but that He Who is Cause and Ground of all that exists, is of such a nature that He can hold communion with us, and we with Him. Man was made, we believe, in His image. And therefore all the qualities which we recognize as highest in ourselves, our mind, our will, our capacity for disinterested love, must exist in Him in a transcendent degree. This conclusion will also follow, if, for the moment, and for the purpose of our argument, we set aside the doctrine of man made in the divine image, as a doctrine revealed in the Bible, and as belonging to a part of revelation with which we have not as yet dealt, and regard man as so far the crown of the age-long development of life on our planet. For it seems to be pressed upon us with irresistible force, that the Cause of that development cannot fall short, in any respect, of that which it has produced. 'He that made the eye, shall He not see?' And we may add, 'He that made man capable of goodness, capable of love, shall He not be Perfect Goodness and Perfect Love?' Shall He not possess, in infinite degree, all, and far more than all, that goes to make up the fullness of the personal life of man?

We have now to consider a higher stage of revelation of God's self-communication to us. But we may conclude by repeating that the supreme interest in affirming the personality of God, is simply this, that that personality is the condition of that personal communion of Him with us and of us with Him, which is, and has always been understood to be, what we mean by religion.

CHAPTER III

BELIEF IN GOD. INSPIRATION

IF these results are true, we have so far a real but a very incomplete knowledge of God. And the source of this knowledge is His revelation of Himself in nature, as Mind and Will. We have just seen that these attributes lead us further, for mind and will imply personality. We were impelled to think of the Source and Ground of all existence as personal, in such sense, at any rate, as admits of intercourse and communion of Him with us, of us with Him.

We can now, having reached this point, consider how closely the idea of personality and the idea of revelation are bound up together. Nothing is more characteristic of a person than his capacity and his desire for intercourse with other persons. When once man (if we may call him so by anticipation) had reached in the course of his long evolution the stage of personal being, he began to develop to a degree immeasurably above that attained by the lower animals, this capacity for communion for others of his race, and gradually perfected the means to this end, which we call language. The origin and growth of human language would indeed be a most marvellous story, if only we had the power to grope into the dimness of mankind's first beginnings. But our point is, that the power and the impulse to devise so wonderful a means of communication, belong to man as a personal being. And, in a transcendent

degree, both power and impulse must exist in that supreme Personal Life which we name God. Hence revelation, the making Himself known to persons who, as such, are in His image, can be no arbitrary act of God, but must represent something central, essential to His nature. Still more must this be true, if we were to assume, which we cannot yet do, the supreme tenet of the Christian Creed, that God is Love. For it is the very meaning of love, to impart itself to others. But even so far as we have gone, we may say it reverently, revelation appears as natural to the Divine Being, as language to beings on the human plane of personality. Such a thought seems to throw a new light on the Biblical expression : ' The Word of God.'

We are thus encouraged to inquire, whether nature is the last word in God's unveiling of Himself to men, whether there may not be a clearer and more adequate means of revelation.

So we believe, and at any rate our argument leads us to think such belief is rational, in the direct action of God on the minds of men. Such direct action has long been known by the name of inspiration. But the idea, and scope of it, is greatly in need of clearing up.

We begin by a definition. Inspiration is a special kind of revelation, which consists in an action of God on the minds of men, or of some men, imparting to them (1) true thoughts about Himself and (2) the power to convey those thoughts to others. Thus inspiration would be the second, more advanced stage, in God's self-disclosure to men, the first or more rudimentary stage being His revelation through nature. In both cases we have God drawing near to man, making Himself known. The second stage

differs from the first, not as being more divine, but in the greater directness or intimacy of the divine action.

We have, therefore, now to consider the area of inspiration. Is this direct action of God on man's minds limited, so that He inspires some men and not others? What we should expect to find, and do in fact find, is that this is indeed the case. We should expect to find it so, because men, and nations, differ from one another in mental and spiritual capacity, as they do in physical appearance. While all men are capable of receiving God's messages, all men are not capable in the same degree. There is here no question of partiality. There are no favoured men or nations. It is, however, very distinctly a question of vocation. That is, God calls men, and He calls nations, to that work for which they are mentally or spiritually fitted, in order that they may fulfil their divinely appointed function, whether in one nation, or in the whole race. Neither men nor nations are ever called for their own sake, but 'for a work of service,' whether that sphere be very limited or world-wide. That is the very meaning of vocation.

We are led to the same conclusion, by following another track of thought. We cannot for a moment think of God's action on men's minds as being mechanical, as a kind of physical pressure. It is supremely difficult not to speak of mental or spiritual facts under terms derived from the physical world. The very expression 'action on' is an instance of this. The nearest parallel, I suppose, to inspiration, would be the influence upon one of a good and wise friend. Here, again, there must be some degree of receptivity on our part; we must

desire, or at least be ready to be influenced. Our minds must be open to suggestion.

We should at all costs maintain that, if we find certain nations, or individuals, to be in a higher degree inspired than others, this does not imply any arbitrary choice on the part of God. The divine action will be in accordance with moral and spiritual laws, the operations of which we can in some degree trace. Of these, the most important we have already noticed, namely, (1) that God makes use of men and nations, according to the various gifts with which He has endowed them, for service to their fellow men, or humanity at large; and (2) that His action in inspiration is dependent upon the receptivity of its objects.

We may, therefore expect to find some nations, and some men, more able than others to receive and to impart the divine message. So God chose a certain nation, Israel, and in that nation certain men, whom we call 'prophets,' to be the recipients of a truer, fuller knowledge of Himself, for the benefit, ultimately, of the whole human race. This is all of a piece with His working in other departments of human life. Thus the Greeks were the chosen people to teach mankind art and philosophy, the Romans to impart lessons on law and government. Thus, also, men are called to be inventors, poets, artists. In precisely similar fashion, Israel's vocation was to be 'the sacred school of the knowledge of God to all mankind,' and in the prophets we see, so to speak, that vocation concentrated and individualized. In all these cases, the same great principle obtains, special gifts are bestowed for a special service.

Hence we need to be on our guard against limiting the divine inspiration, as, for example, by calling

Isaiah inspired, and denying the inspiration of Shakespeare. When we speak of an inspired poet or artist, we are not using a mere figure of speech. Wherever we meet thoughts that approve themselves to the higher nature of men as true and noble, whether those thoughts be embodied in words or marble or music, there we recognize in a strict sense the divine inspiration. God has been imparting such thoughts to gifted and receptive minds, chosen because of their gifts and receptivity, and, therewith, the power to communicate such thoughts to others in an effective way.

We now turn to consider the special inspiration of the Hebrew prophets. In our day it can scarcely be necessary to guard against the idea that a prophet is a man whose chief function is to foretell the future. Assuming that such power might exist, its existence would appear to be devoid of all moral interest or value. As has been well said, the prophet was a for-teller rather than a fore-teller, the man entrusted with the divine message to the men of his day. 'Thus saith the Lord' is the constant watchword of the prophet. It is therefore true to say that if we would understand the meaning of the prophetic utterances, we must have made some study of the history of the period. Only when we have grasped what the words meant to the men of that far-off day, shall we be in a position to understand what they may mean to ourselves. But there are certain broad and deep truths which characterize the prophetic teaching as a whole, and which afford the means of testing the claim to a special inspiration. These great truths, or principles, enunciated in varying tones by all the prophets alike, are three in number. If we would estimate them rightly, we

must take into account, also, the violent contrast which they present to the theological and moral ideas of the age in which they were propounded. Otherwise we shall miss the freshness and originality of the prophetic speech, and we shall fall into the error of regarding as commonplaces, what must have appeared, to the men of that time, as paradoxes. The very possibility of such a mistake, is a witness to the extent to which the teaching of the prophets has become the inheritance of mankind. The prophets, then, insist, with one accord,—

1. That there is One God, as against both the polytheism of the nations surrounding Israel, and also against the henotheism which was the prevailing type of thought among their own countrymen, the orthodoxy of their day. Henotheism is the doctrine that each nation has its own particular God, so that while Jehovah was truly the God of Israel, no less truly, for example, was Chemosh the god of Moab, and Moloch of Ammon. The first article of the prophetic creed was the unity of God, and so penetrated are all the prophets with this great, and in their time original, thought, that quotations are unnecessary.

2. That Jehovah is God not of Israel only, but of all the nations of the earth. This is, of course, a necessary inference from the first truth, that there is but One God, not 'gods many and lords many.' But it was far from being a meaningless repetition. For the practical result of the monotheistic doctrine was, that the national god was closely bound up with the fortunes of the people over whom he presided. It was his function to fight for them against their enemies (compare the sacred ark carried into battle against the Philistines), to see that the harvests were fruitful,

and in all ways to promote the well-being of his nation. In return, their business was to keep him supplied with the food of sacrifice, and duly and punctiliously to perform the rites of his worship. Neglect of the sacred observances would draw upon the whole people all the weight of the divine displeasure. National misfortune of any kind was an infallible token that the god was angry with his people. But his anger was, after all, temporary, and could be appeased by well-known methods, even, it might be, by the sacrifice of 'their dearest and their best.' The earlier books of the Old Testament furnish abundant proofs that such ideas were not confined to the nations we are accustomed to regard as heathen, but belonged to the popular religious orthodoxy of Israel. We misconceive the message of the prophets, if we fail to realize how deeply this idea of Jehovah as a purely national God, was ingrained in contemporary thought. We fail to appreciate the grandeur and the freshness of such passages as these: 'Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto Me, O ye children of Irsael? saith the Lord. Have I not brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor [Crete] and the Syrians from Kir?' (*Amos* ix. 7). 'Hear this word which the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities' (*Amos* iii. 1, 2).

There is no national physical bond which ties Jehovah to His people. No sort of partiality is involved in His free and sovereign choice of them for His own high purpose.

3. Closely connected with this, is the third, and greatest, of the great prophetic truths, namely, that God is, above all and essentially, righteous, and demands righteousness, and not the correct performance of a prescribed ritual, from His people. It is not possible to lay too much stress upon this, the constant burden of the teaching of all the prophets, the very essence of their message, expressed, as that message necessarily is, in varying forms to meet the circumstances of each new age. In vigour, in beauty, in dramatic force, nothing can rival the imaginary dialogue between Balak and Balaam in Micah vi. 5–8. As we read it, we must remember that the ideas which the prophet represents the ancient king of Moab as expressing, were the ideas current in his own time, in the minds of his own people, in regard to their relation to Jehovah.

'O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him: from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteous acts of the Lord. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'

Then comes the majestic answer of the prophet to the anxious monarch.

'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

Or take that wonderful denunciation in Isaiah i.

13–17, of ritual observance, not indeed in itself, but as a substitute for moral service.

'Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me: new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies,—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me: I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood, wash you, make you clean: put away the evil of your doings from mine eyes: cease to do evil, learn to do well: seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.'

These two glorious passages are but specimens of the one theme, reiterated, age after age, in varied form. But one splendid utterance I cannot forbear adding, for it is one of the finest, deepest words about God, and His revelation to man, in the whole range and compass of human words:

'Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit' (*Isa.* lvii. 15).

Let me recall our definition of inspiration, as the direct action of God on the minds of men, giving them true and noble thoughts about Himself, and the power to impart those thoughts to their fellow men. If we believe in God at all, and in the possibility (or rather, probability, if He be in any sense personal) of His action on human minds, on both which points we have seen good reason for feeling assurance, we shall, I am certain, be satisfied that the Jewish prophets were in a very high degree inspired men.

The proof of their inspiration, as in the case of the poet or the artist, is internal. It rests on the appeal which their words make to our own moral consciousness, and not upon any external authority. And the force of that appeal is not lessened by the lapse of time. Indeed to-day we may well feel we have not by any means fully learnt all the lessons they have to teach us, and that our own age would be incomparably better and purer, if men laid to heart the great social teachings of an Amos or an Isaiah. And this surely is a most wonderful thing, and may well help to convince us that ' not by will of man was prophecy conveyed at any time, but being carried along by the Holy Spirit men spake from God ' (2 *S. Pet.* i. 20). Here we have numbers of a small Oriental nation, delivering a message which in its form is obviously fashioned by the circumstances of a time remote, in its ways of thought, from our own, which is yet found to be, in all its main essentials, a message as applicable to our own needs as to those of that far-off age. The writings of the prophets are the possession of humanity for all time. No more convincing proof of their ultimate origin in the will and action of Him Who is eternal, could be ever conceived. No critical researches, no accurate examination of ancient texts, no discoveries of modern psychology, can touch that conviction. All these interesting lines of study, most useful and fruitful in their own sphere, belong to a different level. If our idea of inspiration be the true one, the only proof of it that can be found, must be within ourselves, in the enlightened reason. And there, in the case of the prophets, we do find it, in the authority which their words exercise over what we feel to be morally best in us, in the assent and response which they evoke

from us. The divine in them reaches out to, claims as kindred to itself, the divine in us. In other words we recognize, by the only faculty for such recognition we possess, that they spoke truly when they made that tremendous claim for the authority of their message : ' Thus saith the Lord.'

It will be useful now, to turn to the Old Testament as a whole, in which such prophetic sayings as we have quoted, and many more like them, are imbedded as precious jewels. For one of the causes of the decay of religious belief, in some minds, has been the conviction that ' the critics ' have somehow disposed of the claim of the Old Testament to be ' an inspired book.'

Now, unless our whole trend of thought so far has been radically false, we cannot speak, in any strict sense, of an inspired book, but only of inspired men. And, as we have seen, if inspiration be a fact, it is a fact of the mental and moral order, arising and vindicated therein, and therefore apart from those external surroundings which both critical and historical research have done so much to elucidate. The results which have been achieved in recent studies of the Old Testament may be very briefly and cursorily summed up as follows : (*a*) We have learnt a great deal about the dates and composition of the writings included in that volume and, in consequence, have gained a far clearer idea than was possible before, of the development of religious ideas among the ancient Israelites, and (*b*) we have acquired a great deal of information about the relation of the religion of Israel, its rites and sacred customs, its conceptions of morality and theology, to the religions of the ancient world in general, and, in particular, to those of the nations who were akin to the Israelites in

blood, or with whom they were brought into contact at the various periods of their history.

There is in all this nothing to disturb our conviction of a clear and definite message from God delivered through the great prophets. With one most important exception, the new researches into our Old Testament Scriptures are on a different level from interests of a spiritual or religious order. This exception is, that, while our assurance of a real inspiration remains unshaken, we have at last gained a rational conception of the Old Testament as a whole, a conception which increases, instead of diminishing our sense of its permanent value.

We have come to realize far more strongly that we have in it not a single volume, but the literature of a people, extending well over a thousand years. This literature is distinguished from that of any other nation, by a most profound sense of God as a present, living, active reality in the life of the race, and in the lives of individuals. This is precisely what we would be led to expect, if God did in fact make choice of this nation to be the medium and vehicle of conveying a truer and higher knowledge of Himself to mankind in general. This characteristic will appear all the more wonderful, if we consider that all kinds and descriptions of national literature are represented, and that it is present in all of them.

We have, to begin with, the ancient myths, told and retold ages before they were committed to writing, of the origin of all things and the beginning of the world. Such myths are the inheritance of every nation, and some of them, from most widely separated regions and most diverse races, present an extraordinary similarity. It has long ago been pointed out, that the Hebrew and Babylonian myths

are closely connected, so that we have to assume either common descent or later borrowing. But, with the external resemblances, the likeness ceases. There can be no stronger evidence, except in the great prophetic passages noted above, of the action of inspiration. For while the old Babylonian stories are full of weird and grotesque accounts of the doings of gods and goddesses, those of the Hebrews, in the form in which we have them in our Bibles, have been so modified as to become the vehicles of the most sublime and spiritual truths, which time can never stale. Think of the great teachings of the first chapters of Genesis: the One Creator, Lord of heaven and earth: man made in God's image and destined for fellowship with Him: sin as being essentially disobedience, and inevitably resulting in separation from God. All true religion rests upon these simple foundations. We have outgrown the natural science of Genesis, we can never outgrow its spiritual teaching. And how could such sublime truths be conveyed to simple men, save in the form of stories, especially of such stories as were familiar to them, in their main outlines, from childhood?

> Truth, embodied in a tale,
> Shall enter in at lowly doors.

And, we may add, in order to make a universal appeal to mankind, spiritual truths must be expressed in the vivid, pictorial imagery of a story, not in the abstract language of philosophy.

A large part of the Old Testament, again, is taken up by the records of the national history. We can have little doubt, I think, that, as in the case of all other peoples, legend has largely entered in at the

earliest stages, although we now recognize that there is more historical foundation in such legends than was formerly supposed. And, in the main, the historical portions of the Hebrew scriptures are marked by the prevailing God-consciousness of the writers. The histories in the books of Samuel and Kings are well reckoned as among the 'prophetic writings.'[1] This unique characteristic, that the authors discover the working of God in the national life, is surely a mark of genuine inspiration, unless we are prepared to assert that it is not a true thought of Him, which represents His working in and through the bewildering complications which make up human history, as directed to the fulfilment of the divine purpose.

Criticism may have altered our ideas as to the date of the various psalms constituting the Psalter. It cannot touch the profound spiritual meaning which they, at any rate the great majority of them, have possessed for each succeeding generation of men, who have seen in them the mirror of their own deepest aspirations and longings for communion with God. We can find to-day no better training in the spiritual life than the use of these ancient songs, which have become the handbook of Christian devotion.

As we go through these ancient scriptures we are forced to acknowledge the clear tokens of the action of God on the minds of men, to recognize the presence of inspiration, doubtless in many varying degrees. It is a real gain, not a loss, as some have found, that we have ceased to confound inspiration with inerrancy, that is, the idea that the writers were miraculously preserved from falling into mistakes,

[1] They are so reckoned in the Hebrew Bible.

whether in regard to historical fact or natural science, and to find the proof of it, instead, in the universal appeal to that which is highest and best in man, universal in the sense that it is not confined to any age or nation. 'Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.' The proof of the presence and activity of the Spirit, lies in our own spirit, akin, as we believe it is, to the divine.

But one of the greatest gains contributed by modern knowledge to our understanding of the Old Testament, is the clear and most impressive evidence of a gradual growth in the knowledge of God. It is from failure to understand this, that the gravest misunderstandings and difficulties have arisen. We no longer feel that we are called upon to reconcile the idea of the God Who commanded the wholesale massacre of the Canaanites, or approved of the treacherous murder of Sisera, with the teachings of the New Testament. We trace instead a development, spread through many centuries, in the Israelitish conception of Deity. We find Jehovah at first conceived of, quite naturally, as the tribal God, reflecting the characteristics of those wild and savage times. And, in the end, we discover the crown of this long development, in the prophetic conception of the one Lord of all, Who is essentially righteous, and Who impartially demands righteousness of all who would be in fellowship with Him. It is a most wonderful and moving drama, enacted in the sphere of the human mind, this slow, gradual discovery of God. I would not apologize for, but rather insist upon, the use of the word discovery. For it is the correlative of the word we are accustomed to use in this connection, the word revelation. What is, on the part of God, revelation, the gradual unveiling of His

nature according as men were 'able to bear it,' is on man's side the gradual process of discovery, which implies the assimilation by the human mind of material presented to it from without. This is just as true of the science of nature as of the knowledge of God. In both cases there is the same twofold process. The human mind does not create, it appropriates, makes its own, that which is given to it. And in both cases, God is the Giver, revealing Himself, in the one case through nature, in the other through the minds of men whom He raised up to be, in their various ways, teachers of their fellow men.

There is a further and a deeper meaning to be traced in the Old Testament. To this we shall come in the next chapter. But, so far, we have established the claim that in it we possess a true 'word of God,' a clear and definite message, an authentic disclosure of His Mind and Will, 'in many parts and in many ways,' a message and disclosure most articulate in the prophets, which has become, stripped of all accidents of time and circumstance, the permanent and priceless inheritance of mankind.

CHAPTER IV

BELIEF IN GOD. THE INCARNATION

'GOD having spoken in many parts and in many ways of old time to the fathers in the prophets, in these last days spoke to us in One Who is a Son.' Our task, in the present chapter, is to try to justify this high theme, to exhibit the Christian faith as the true and natural, because God-created and God-directed, development of that process of revelation we have hitherto traced.

We may begin by ennumerating the heads of our former argument.

1. There are the strongest reasons for believing that the source of the order, beauty, and purpose of the universe is most rightly thought of as personal, that is, as God.

2. Personality implies the power and the will to hold communion with other persons. In the case of God, this will take the form of revelation, the unveiling, perforce gradual, of His Nature and Character to men.

3. At a certain stage, this process of revelation takes that form we know as inspiration, the direct action of God on the minds of men receptive of such influence, and chosen as being receptive. This action consists in imparting true thoughts about Himself, and the power of conveying such thoughts to others.

4. We refused to limit the sphere of inspiration.

We recognized it in the artist, the poet, the philosopher. But in the moral and spiritual sphere, we have seen that it is present in the highest degree in the great prophets and psalmists, and can be traced throughout that great national literature of Israel, which is contained in the Old Testament. So far we have substantiated the statement of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that 'God spake of old time—in the prophets.'

We saw that in that literature is to be traced the clear tokens of a gradual progress in the knowledge of God, from crude and barbaric conceptions to the sublime ideas of the prophets and psalmists. But the process, as far as the Old Testament goes, appears to be incomplete. There is unmistakably an air of expectation, of looking forward to some further and greater manifestation of God. For the writers of the Old Testament, the golden age lies in the future, not, as in other peoples of antiquity, in the past. And although, in some cases, their outlook is confined to the fortunes of Israel, in others it so broadens out as to become world-wide. 'The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.'

We are left, in the end, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, with a revelation of God which satisfies mind and heart up to a certain point, and which we are assured can never be outgrown or antiquated. The idea of God as righteous and demanding righteousness, is an advance upon that earlier revelation in nature, of His power and wisdom. It is an enormous advance on the current religious ideas which the prophets found at work around them. Any further development must take this in and build upon it

Now, the Christian faith makes the claim, that in fact a further revelation, which the prophets expected, has been given, but on a higher plane than that of inspiration. Revelation through nature, is the first stage of the divine self-manifestation. Revelation in and through the minds of men, receptive and on that account selected, which we call inspiration, is the second stage. Now we come to the belief, which we shall have to examine, that there is a third and higher stage in the continuous process of manifestation, that the Eternal Spirit has revealed Himself in a perfect human life, the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The stage of inspiration leads up to and is followed by the stage of incarnation.

It will repay us to look a little closer into the Christian claim, before we consider at all the grounds on which it is based.

1. First, then, it is the extraordinary assertion that, by an act of loving will, the Eternal Source of all things, has willed to subject Himself to the conditions of our humanity, in order to make a perfect and final disclosure of His being and character to mankind. It is obvious, or ought to be obvious, that however one might grow in the understanding of what was given or involved in such a revelation, a manifestation of God as man to men must in its very nature be final, complete, as far as man is concerned. He would thus make Himself fully intelligible to human faculties, and no way can be conceived by which He could become more intelligible. Doubtless, there would be infinite depths beyond. It would be unspeakably absurd, to imagine that God could be completely revealed in this human manifestation of Himself. We must always add, to the claim of finality for the Christian

religion, 'as far as man is concerned.' But with what is beyond the reach of human capacity, we have clearly no concern. If the Christian faith be true, we see God in Jesus as clearly and completely as we can ever see Him, and the only advance (and a very real advance it is) possible or conceivable, is in a deeper and wider understanding of what is involved in the revelation of the Incarnate God. 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.' It seems probable that this saying will hold good of any one of the successive periods of Christian history. In other words, we shall never be able to exhaust the meaning of the Christ.

2. If we are right, and surely we are, in thus interpreting the original, historic Christian Creed, it follows that we must reject decisively all modern experiments of a 'reduced Christology,' which all come to this, that no distinction in kind exists between the second stage of God's self-disclosure, inspiration, and the third, incarnation. Jesus is represented as a man inspired in a higher degree than other men, as one in whom the Word (*S. John* i. 1) Who dwells in all men in varying degrees, dwelt in a pre-eminent degree, with a peculiar intimacy and fullness. We can perfectly well believe, both that God dwells in all men, in the sense that no man is without, or, at all events, need be without, the divine assistance and comradeship, and that this is so because of a real kinship between the human and the divine; and also, that incarnation does not admit of degrees, less or more. God was either incarnate in Jesus, or He was not. It is easy to see the attraction of such theories, and it is our duty to try and grasp the truth which they contain. They represent

a revolt against a breach of continuity, against anything which appears so altogether miraculous as a real incarnation of God. But we are not to make a fetish of continuity, or rather of what we think continuity must demand. New things, new in kind and not merely in degree, are constantly appearing in the natural process, such as life, consciousness, self-consciousness. And, although this is not the place to enter upon such a discussion, I am convinced that our ideas about the miraculous need a thorough sifting and clearing up. God is active, not here and there, but at every point of the world-process, but at certain points His activity presents new features to us. But, at any rate, our great teachers of the Incarnation, S. Paul and S. John, are as far as possible from believing in any real breach of continuity. They would have us think of the world-process as one, which has its origin, its connecting principle, and its goal in Him whom we call, as incarnate, Jesus Christ. He is 'the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, because in Him were created all things, both in heaven and on earth, things visible and things invisible . . . all things have been created through Him and unto Him, and He is before all things, and all things hold together in Him' (*Col.* i. 15–17). 'All things came into being through Him . . . in Him was life, and the life was the light of men . . . and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us' (*S. John* i. 3, 4, 14). When Christ came into the world, it was not for Him an entrance into a strange and foreign scene. He, before His arrival in our flesh, before, that is, He willed to immerse Himself in earthly, creaturely conditions, was that world's life and meaning, the light of reason within man, 'lightening every man

coming into the world.' The Incarnation is the crown of nature's long process, the revelation of the significance of human life and the disclosure of man's destiny. But, once more, all this is true, and only true, if we have in Jesus a real incarnation of God, and not an instance of an extraordinary degree of inspiration.

3. The wonder of the Christian faith staggers imagination. I am inclined to think that the man who hesitates to believe, has sometimes in him the germ of a far truer and deeper faith than the man who gives to it a kind of conventional acceptance, without realizing the marvel of the Incarnate God.

The very God! Think, Abib, dost thou think?
So, the All-great were the All-loving too—
So through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself!
Thou hast no power, nor mayst conceive of Mine,
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love Me, Who have died for thee!'

4. Belief in the Incarnation is not a separated or isolated article in the Christian Creed. In a sense, it is the whole of it. Here is no stone, however large or important, which may be removed, with whatever damage, but still leave a respectable structure standing. It is the foundation of the building. And it is more, and our architectural metaphor fails us here. For it is that which determines the very nature of the building, the order, the shape, the symmetry, of all its parts. And not only does this hold good of the Creed. Everything that can be called Christian, Christian ethics, worship, sacraments,

depends wholly and utterly on belief in Jesus as God incarnate in our manhood.

5. The Incarnation, if it be true, is the central point of human history. All that went before, all human religion and philosophy, all ancient beliefs and cults, all vague and dim anticipations and longings, as well as the clearer views of Jewish prophecy, find here their issue and their crown. The entire past of mankind has been a preparation for the Christ. 'When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son' (*Gal.* iv. 4). And, on the other hand, all the long unknown future of the race, will be the unfolding of the implications of the Incarnation, the progressive appropriation of the infinite riches of the Christ. 'The mystery' of the divine will is 'to sum up all things in Christ' (*Eph.* i. 9, 10).

We have now to consider the grounds on which our belief is claimed for so stupendous a fact as the Incarnation. And, first of all, we will place some quite general thoughts, which may dispose us to regard this specifically Christian faith as true, before we think of the particular, direct evidence upon which it rests. To these general considerations I attach a very high degree of value, because they tend to show that belief in the Incarnation does fit in with the great body of beliefs which we hold about God and the world, about man's nature and history. For after all, this is the most satisfactory reason we can have for regarding any particular fact as true, that it fits in with what appears to be the general structure of reality, that it is consistent with, and throws new light upon, other facts which we believe to be true, that it falls into its place in our view of the universe as a whole, as a system of which the parts

harmonize with each other. That the universe is such a system, is the very foundation of all rational thinking.

(i) First then, if we have followed the argument so far, if we believe in the God of the prophets, as the Being Who includes in Himself all moral perfections, Who is, above all, love, then the Incarnation appears infinitely worthy of Him. For it marks the very extreme to which love can go. It is the limit of voluntary condescension (in the true sense) and humility. 'Being in the form of God—that is, truly and essentially God—He regarded not equality with God as a prize to be snatched at, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men; and being found in outward fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, and that the death of the Cross' (*Phil.* ii. 6-8). Let us take what is, in this connection, a somewhat childish illustration. Imagine a great king being so moved with what he has heard of the miserable condition of some of his subjects, that he voluntarily abdicates his state, and, in order to relieve and raise the most abject and suffering class among them, comes to live among them as in all respects one of themselves, thoroughly identifying himself with their wretched lot. Then multiply such self-humiliation, such descent for love's sake, a million-fold, and we get a faint picture of the divine love in the Incarnation. So the very wonder of it, of which we have just spoken, becomes a help rather than a hindrance to belief. For is not such an act infinitely worthy of the King of kings? Or, rather, dropping now the metaphor of king and subjects, which, after all, is but an inadequate representation of the relation of God to man,

does not the Incarnation appear in perfect agreement with the conception of God as the perfectly good Being, and therefore perfect love?

(ii) In the second place, the Incarnation comes as the fitting climax of all God's dealings with man, in the way of revelation in nature and through inspired men. He Who made Himself known to men, first in His works, then through men, last of all perfectly and finally revealed Himself to them as Man, known and intelligible as one of themselves. 'He is not ashamed to call them brethren.' Or consider the order in which the aspects of the divine nature are thus disclosed, first as power and wisdom, then as righteousness, finally as love. Profoundly true is the old saying: 'The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, the Old Testament opens out into the New.' In the earlier stages of God's revelation, was already contained the promise of that which was to come, and in the later we see the full meaning, the perfect consummation and crown of all that went before.

(iii) In the third place, a very strong reason for belief in the Incarnation lies in the extraordinary power such belief, once admitted, is found to possess in explaining some of the greatest difficulties which surround human life. We may mention two of them. The first, is the felt incompleteness of our nature. We are conscious of wonderful powers, of intelligence, of imagination, of spiritual aspiration, which raise us to a level indefinitely higher than that of merely animal existence. Yet these same powers appear to have been given us only to be frustrated, ever reaching out to an aim which they ever fail to attain. The restless curiosity of the intellect would reach to the furthest limit of the

universe, but falls back like a bird beating its wings in vain against the bars of a cage. Our imagination soars upwards to the infinite, but quickly drops to earth again. And how poor seems the result of all our aspirations towards a nobler, purer, truer life. In every case, we are brought up against a limit, which expresses our powerlessness. And yet, as has been finely said, to be conscious of a limit is already to have passed beyond it. We cannot conceive of an animal being conscious of its own limitations. Man, unlike the animal, is, has been always, however dimly, aware of an element of the divine, the infinite, in his nature. Man, Aristotle said long ago, is a social animal. He is always overpassing the bounds of his own individual being, reaching out towards communion with his fellows, and finding a fuller, richer life in that communion. With equal truth we may say that he is a religious animal, reaching out towards communion with his God, and finding therein at last the promise of the fullest, richest life of which he is capable. Now the Incarnation, in the highest possible degree, holds out the assurance that such union with God is indeed attainable, and provides the means for such attainment, through fellowship with the human Christ, Who is also divine. It is thus an answer to the deepest of all human needs, it points to the fulfilment of the age-long striving of man towards the divine, it comes to complete our conscious incompleteness.

Again, as we shall see later, the Incarnation throws light upon the saddest, deepest mystery of our existence here, the mystery of pain and suffering. For although it does not clear up all speculative difficulties, it shows us God as bearing with us our human burden, not an aloof spectator, but 'our fellow-sufferer.'

We cannot, I believe, exaggerate the support and confidence brought to the aid of our faith, when that faith is seen as the most satisfying solution, far more so than the solutions offered from any other quarters, of the great problems of human life. I think we get here our nearest approach to a scientific proof of the Christian Creed. A strict proof we cannot get, in the very nature of things, any more than we can prove the love of friend or wife. But it is well known that the only test of the great scientific generalizations, is the number of facts which they can explain. And belief in God as revealed in Christ, offers a far more widely reaching explanation of the universe, and man's place in it, than can be claimed for the most deeply tested theories of science or of philosophy.

> I say, the acknowledgement of God in Christ
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee,
> All questions in the earth and out of it.

These, then, are what we have called the general grounds for belief in the Incarnation. They are, as we have seen, exceedingly strong grounds for holding that belief to be well grounded. But we must ever remember that the Christian Creed is not a philosophy, although it involves one. By its very nature, it is rooted in history. The Incarnation of God took place, could only have taken place, at a definite moment of time and a definite point of space. And, therefore, we rightly demand for it, not merely that the idea of it shall satisfy our reason and our feelings, but that its alleged occurrence should be established by historical evidence. Here we must first deal with the obvious difficulty: What kind of evidence can we reasonably ask for such a fact as this, which

includes two very different elements, one which belongs to the eternal world, and therefore is inaccessible to our senses, and one which is, so to speak, entirely on our human level, as being the life lived on earth by One Who, whatever else He was, was most certainly Man? We would do better to put the question in a somewhat different way. What evidence have we actually got, and is it sufficient to justify belief?

We may be quite sure, from what has been just said, that an absolute historical proof of a real Incarnation of God, is in the nature of things impossible. I mean a proof of such a kind that we would be forced to consider a man mentally deficient if he did not assent to it. Such a proof can be produced for the Norman invasion of England, or the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. Such a proof, we shall see, can be produced for the existence of Jesus as an historical character. All these are facts which fall within the observation of men, and we accept them, because we believe that the witnesses who saw them are trustworthy, and that we can rely on the records which have come down to us as containing their witness. But the fact of the Incarnation belongs to that eternal world, which is inaccessible to our senses. I may point out here, that there are many things inaccessible to sense, which we believe as firmly as we do those things we can see and hear. Thus we believe that certain events will happen in the future, as that the sun will 'rise' to-morrow, because we are convinced of a principle which can, notwithstanding, never be 'proved,' that nature is a uniform system. Thus, which is a much closer analogy, we believe in the love of those nearest and dearest to us. In such

cases, what we have to rely upon is experience, of our own, or of other men. And we make an act of faith, that is, we believe, we accept as true, certain conclusions drawn from such experience, although they are, in their nature, beyond the reach of our senses. Now, belief in the Incarnation was such an act of faith, on the part of the first followers of Jesus, and it was, of course, based upon their experience of Him. What we can do is this. We can as far as possible find out what that experience was, and ask ourselves whether it justifies a similar act of faith on our part. Although obviously we cannot revive the freshness and vividness of that first-hand experience, yet the nature of our records is such, that we can very well grasp its main outlines and its great features. And, to make up for our loss, we have access to an immense body of human experience to which the first disciples could have no access, the effects of the life of Jesus during all those centuries of human history, and the continued existence and activity of the Christian Church. Then we can examine our view of this vast range of experience, with the general grounds in reason for belief in the Incarnation which we have already examined, and ask ourselves whether all this material warrants our making, in our turn, that act of faith which finds expression in the earliest creed, 'Jesus is Lord.'

There is something very especially individual about such an act. Religious belief cannot, as we say, 'be forced down a man's throat.' There are facts which we believe because our minds appear to be so constituted that we cannot help believing them, as that $2+2=4$. There are facts, as we have just seen, which we believe on the word of other people whom we have reason to trust. Such are

historical events in the past; or the present existence of objects we have never seen, nor are likely to see, as the Pyramids of Egypt; or, again, scientific facts which we have neither the capacity nor opportunity of verifying for ourselves. There are facts which we believe on the evidence of our senses, even though this, like the testimony of others, is not infallible. So that it would appear, that even here the element of faith, a belief that rests on evidence, yet goes beyond it, enters in to some extent. And there are facts which we believe as firmly as we do anything, which rest on evidence indeed, which appeal, as we said, to experience, our own or some one else's, but which so far go beyond evidence or experience, that a larger element of faith is called for, as in the case of human love, or the truths of religion, which are the expressions of the divine love. Thus, in this latter case, far more of ourselves, our own individuality, comes into play than in the former. Faith is a personal matter, in a deeper and truer sense than our belief that $2+2=4$, or that Hannibal crossed the Alps. And this is exactly what we should expect. God is (we have seen reason to believe) personal, all His dealings with men are of the nature of a personal appeal, and therefore are meant to call out a personal response. We must be left free to believe or disbelieve, just as, in the region of morality, which is equally an individual affair, so far as our own response to the moral law is concerned, we must be left free to obey or disobey.

But faith, if free, must yet be based on rational grounds. Else it is not faith, but superstition. And we have now to consider the rational grounds for faith in the Incarnation which are, not general, but

historical, as based upon a great mass of human experience.

I think it is better, on the whole, to take this evidence in the following order :

(1) The effects which the life of Jesus has had on all after history, and then

(2) The effects which that life produced on the minds of His contemporaries.

Under (1) we shall range the indirect effects, in what we have come to call Christian civilization, and the direct effects, in the existence of the Church : under (2) we shall consider the evidence of the New Testament.

I think there is some advantage in taking this order, in beginning, that is, with what is nearest to ourselves. And, while not necessarily stronger evidence, the varying strength of the different kinds of evidence being a matter of individual opinion, this is at any rate that part of the evidence which can be most easily and readily estimated, and is independent of the researches of learned specialists. It is, in other words, the most deeply and thoroughly human and direct in its appeal.

This twofold historical evidence for the Incarnation we consider in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE INCARNATION AS A FORCE IN HISTORY

(*a*) *The Incarnation and the World.*

TO my own mind the kind of evidence for the truth of the belief in the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ which is most cogent and convincing, is furnished by what has followed His appearance. In the end, this is the strongest kind of evidence available for any event or fact of the past, that we can see its effects working in the present. What proof can be so clear of the existence, or the greatness of an historical character, than that we can point to-day to the results of his life or teaching? In proportion to the extent of such influence, we estimate the force and depth of his personality. Now, in the case of Jesus Christ, this evidence exists in overwhelming amount. If by long acquaintance with the fact our minds had not been dulled it must appear to us as the strangest phenomenon history presents to us, that the whole course of human affairs for wellnigh 2,000 years, the passing away of the ancient world and the creation of the modern world, should be the direct result of the life and teaching of a Jewish peasant in the first century of our era. There is no question here of the work of the disciples greater than, or equal to, their Master. Even the most eminent of our Lord's first followers

owed all they were, and rejoice in the confession, to the Master. Of Him they were but interpreters, and the greatest of them but imperfect interpreters. In the background of all there is ever the unique personality of Jesus Christ, the greatest creative force which the world has ever known. We think of S. Paul, the man of keen insight, of boundless energy, of far-seeing vision, glorying in the title of 'the slave of Jesus Christ.' There is the miracle of miracles, the influence which sprang, and is ever springing, from the personality of Christ. We cannot indeed draw the conclusion, 'therefore He was Incarnate God.' For we start, perforce, from human experience, which is finite, and from no possible range of finite experience can we conclude by a logical process the existence of that which is infinite and divine. The two things belong to two different even if connected levels of thought and being. But if, as in other somewhat parallel cases (as, for example, on our own level, of the conception of nature as a grand system connected throughout by uniform laws), we start with the presence of God in Jesus as an hypothesis, we have not only a sufficient explanation, but, so far as we can see, the only explanation which is, so to speak, big enough to include all the facts.

We are not saying, what would obviously not be true, that our modern civilization is Christian, or that any existing nation deserves the title of a Christian nation. But this refusal to apply that which we instinctively feel would be the highest possible moral praise, is a witness to the homage we pay to the ideal realized in Jesus and in part expressed in His teaching. On the other hand, the profoundest difference between the ancient and modern worlds lies just in this, that in the latter this ideal has been, and is, to

some extent, operative, and is not, as it has never been, wholly ineffectual.

It is impossible completely to express that ideal in words. For it is one with the personality of Jesus Christ, and even our own personalities cannot be exhausted in words. But we shall not be going wrong if we say this, that what men saw, and see, in Him, is a new vision of the worth and dignity of the individual human life. If we consider specifically Christian movements, what we should unhesitatingly recognize as such, as the emphasis laid on personal purity, the reverence paid to womanhood, the more or less intense moral indignation which lies at the root of social reform, the indignation that human beings should be exploited for the financial profit of other human things, we shall see that it is just this vision of the value of each separate human life which is in each case the impulsive force. And this is the new creation (by no means yet completed) of Jesus Christ. Or, think how men have been content to go on with abuses, such as the toleration of slavery, or the iniquitous condition of child labour in factories, hardly more than a century ago, then, when the sudden revelation came, heralded by some great reformer for the most part, we see at once that this is what is in the Master's mind, that consciously or unconsciously these men are giving expression, in some one particular case, to what Christ came to show to mankind, the true dignity of manhood.

All this is not to deny how grievously He has been and still is misinterpreted by His professed disciples, how what is absolutely contrary to the mind of Christ has sometimes been taught as Christian. There shines, in confutation of all abuses and wild

aberrations, the solitary, majestic personality of the Christ in the pages of the Gospels and in the lives of His saints. Nor shall we be tempted to be guilty of the gross exaggeration of denying all goodness, humanity, truth to the ancient world. But we are brought face to face with the most astounding fact that this Jew of the first century has changed and is changing the world, and that His influence is working, precisely as He said it would work, as the leaven which very slowly penetrates and transforms the huge reluctant mass. That influence wanes not with time, but is to-day as potent as ever it has been. No man can escape that greatest challenge ever presented to the human mind, 'What think ye of Christ?'

(*b*) *The Incarnation and the Church.*

By far the most astonishing result of the appearance of Jesus Christ is the continued existence and activity of the Christian Church. And in this we find stronger testimony to the truth of the Creed even than in the Gospels and other books of the New Testament. The Church is, in the first place, older than any of the written records of Christianity. Already the Church was at work bearing witness to her Master, teaching and administering the sacraments, before even a word of our New Testament had been written. Even if all our documents had perished without a trace, immeasurably great as our loss would have been, 'the living and abiding voice,' as a bishop of the early second century calls it, would be testifying to the great central facts of the Faith. 'The Church to teach, the Bible to prove,' runs the old saying. But, in a sense, the very presence and work among men, after some nineteen centuries, of

the teaching body, is a proof of the abiding truth of that which is the centre of the teaching, the Person and Work of the Lord Christ. Here, in the mere fact that the Church is still going on, is something which constitutes a visible appeal to the minds of men here and now, which to some, at any rate, appears a more stable foundation than that of ancient documents, subjected, as they rightly are, to methods of critical research, of which the results can only be judged and tested by professed scholars.

But this line of thought requires more expression than such a statement as the above, which has been put the more strongly, as it represents the personal conviction of the writer. I want to set out the reasons why I consider the strongest claim of the Christian faith to consist in this present existence and activity of the Christian Church.

First, then, it would seem hardly possible to deny, although it has been denied on very insufficient grounds, that it was the deliberate intention of Christ to call into existence a body of men and women who should live by His teaching. There are at least three decisive proofs. (i) The choice and call of the Apostles, and the time and the care which Christ, increasingly as His ministry drew towards its close, spent on their preparation and training for their future work. Here was the nucleus round which, in point of fact, the new society did grow up. Hence, the great importance of their being brought, as far as possible, into sympathy with the mind of the Master. Hence, too, the gift of the promised Spirit Who should bring to mind all that He had said to them, Who 'should lead them into all the truth.' His very last instructions to them, during the great Forty Days after the Resur-

rection, were concerned with 'the kingdom of God.' So S. Luke tells us. And if we may not simply identify the Church with the kingdom, to dissociate them is absurd. The Church is at least the means of extending the kingdom, and, at any given time, its embodiment and representative, however inadequate, upon earth. Can we imagine that all this prolonged training, this promised supernatural equipment of the Apostles for their work, was really, in the thought of Christ Himself, quite unnecessary, inasmuch as He believed that the world was almost immediately to come to an end with His Second Coming? For it is in the interests of this view, that it is most commonly denied that our Lord meant to found a Church. And, whatever support such a view may find in certain sayings, it is unable to explain, for example, the parables, drawn chiefly from the plant world, which give the idea of the kingdom as the result of a slow and gradual development. Also, it is unable to account for the sayings of Christ which constitute our second line of proof.

(ii) These sayings are such as beyond doubt indicate the intention of our Lord to establish a society which should have a very definite basis in discipleship to Himself, and, hardly less clearly, one which had a long course of development before it. 'Go ye and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . .' (*S. Matt.* xxviii. 19). 'This Gospel of the kingdom must first be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all the nations, and then shall the end come' (*S. Matt.* xxiv. 14). It will be noticed that these came from the distinctively Jewish Gospel of S. Matthew. 'He said to them, Thus it is written . . . that there should be preached, on the basis of (the exact meaning of the Greek text)

His Name, repentance unto remission of sins to all the nations' (*S. Luke* xxiv. 46, 47). And then there is the great commission which S. Luke records the ascended Christ to have given to His Apostles: 'Ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth' (*Acts* i. 8). It is irrational to rule out such sayings as spurious, because we come to the Gospels with a fixed idea as to what Christ must have said, or not said. Such a proceeding is thoroughly unscientific. Modern science would not exist, if men had approached nature with preconceived notions of their own, instead of, quite humbly and patiently, trying to discover what her message really is, and not forcing the facts into some narrow mould, formed either on certain ideas they brought with them to the search, or on the foundation of a narrow experience of one particular class of facts. A true theory must embrace all the facts and beware above all of excluding those which do not seem to fit in with it.

(iii) Last, it is impossible to ignore the social meaning of the two great sacraments which Christ Himself instituted. Baptism, whatever else it may be, is the act of admission into a society, initiation into the Christian brotherhood. The Eucharist, whatever else it may be, is the sacred meal by which the members of the brotherhood are united at once to their Lord, and to each other. 'One bread, one body, are we the many, for we all partake of the one bread' (1 *Cor.* x. 17). As such, as binding together the members of a religious society by common participation in a sacred meal, it has parallels all the world over. Baptism and the Eucharist alike imply the existence, in this case the future, intended,

existence of a fellowship of men ' upon the basis of the Name ' of Christ.

If we consider the evidence which comes to us along these three distinct lines we can have no doubt that, during His earthly ministry, Christ was continually looking forward to, and was taking the first steps towards, the creation of a great, even world-wide society, which should be His witness to all men, and should continue and perpetuate His work.

And the marvellous thing is, that that society is still here, still actively at work upon the very lines on which He intended it should work. And the marvel is all the greater, when we consider the miserable divisions, the appalling aberrations from the mind of Christ, which have again and again marked the course of Christian history. ' We have this treasure in earthen vessels.' But, in spite of the exceeding earthiness of the vessels, the treasure abides and the living voice is still heard, and the witness is still borne, by the Church, of which He foretold that ' the gates of Hades should not prevail against it.'

Consider the wonder of these familiar facts.

(i) The Church still has its true basis of union in ' the Name.' All its Creeds are but expansion of the original Apostolic confession ' Jesus is Lord ' (*Rom.* x. 9).

(ii) I suppose we hardly ever give a thought to the extraordinary religious revolution which underlies our familiar Sunday. The Sabbath was an institution ages old among the Jews. Although the Jewish Christians at the beginning observed both days, the Sabbath at length disappeared. But to this very time, all Christians still observe ' the first

day of the week' as the weekly festival of the Resurrection of the Lord. It is impossible to exaggerate the evidential value of an institution like this, in commemoration of an historical fact, which goes back (*S. John* xx. 26) to within one week after its occurrence. Even the witness of the New Testament, with which we shall shortly be dealing, is less belief-compelling, to my mind, than this continual witness of 'the living voice of the Christian society. The Church still, in every part of it, keeping Sunday, is the strongest evidence we have of the Resurrection. When the Catholic goes to Mass, and the Nonconformist to his prayer-meeting, they are testifying to that continuous life which links them to the little band in that upper room where the Risen Christ appeared to His disciples.

(iii) And, last of our wonders, the Church still observes the great original Christian rite of 'the breaking of the bread,' instituted by the Lord Himself, as the memorial of His Passion. Each Eucharist brings home to us, not merely as events long past, but as the most alive and operative of all facts of the present, the Cross and the Resurrection, the sacrificial death and the eternal life through and by that death. Once more we are of the brotherhood, then gathered in a single room, now spread over the whole earth, which received the Bread and the Cup from the Lord's own hands.

I do not think that any stronger testimony to our faith is to be found, than in this continuous existence and activity of the Christian Church. In this, the first disciples learnt to see the presence and working of the Lord Jesus Himself, in the Body which He indwelt by His Spirit. 'The former treatise have I made,' S. Luke writes at the head of the first

Church history we possess, ' of all the things which Jesus began both to do and to teach,' as if he were now about to record the continuation, under different conditions, of the same Life which was the subject of his Gospel. At any rate, this idea is expressed in the metaphor which his great master, S. Paul, applies to the Church, when he speaks of it as the Body of Christ, as being the actual organ of Christ's presence and activity upon earth.

(c) *The Witness of the New Testament.*

In a very true sense, this is really a part of the witness of the Church, which we have just considered. For the collection of books which we term, as a whole, the New Testament is both a witness to, and the product of the life of, that society which is living and vigorous to-day. We lose enormously if we tear it away from that life in which it had its origin, and regard it as merely consisting of ancient documents. It was written by members of the Church for their fellow members, not to convince outsiders, but to establish, correct, enrich a faith which already existed. And these particular writings we read to-day as our sacred books, because, in the end, and after some vicissitudes, the Church chose these as being pre-eminently edifying for her members. That is the process of ' canonization.' We are not concerned here with the details of the process. But it is sufficiently clear that this selection expresses not the decision of authority, but the general mind of the body of believers. Official authority stepped in at a later date, to ratify that which, in its main outlines, had been already decided, even if in part unconsciously, by a higher tribunal, the spiritual sense of the Church. This consideration, that behind the

New Testament, and pulsating through it, is the great common life of a society, renders us comparatively indifferent to many critical questions. Supposing, for example, the fourth Gospel were written not by S. John, the son of Zebedee, but by some other early disciple, it may still be an invaluable witness and interpretation of the Life of Christ. If, to take an instance of less importance, '2 S. Peter' is wrongly ascribed to that Apostle, such a fact will not impair whatever spiritual lessons the writer succeeded in conveying to his harassed fellow Christians, or the value of his teaching to us Christians of a later day. We are not bound, again, by any doctrine of infallibility, to which the authors make no sort of claim. But we do possess here a simply invaluable witness to the Divine Source, and to the earliest beginnings, of that mighty stream of spiritual life in which we also share.

Therefore, in what follows, I am not attempting to write even the briefest sketch of what is known as 'New Testament Introduction.' We shall only deal with the New Testament as part of the witness to the Incarnation. As we have just seen, it lies within that larger witness which is borne by the Church. 'Ye shall be My witnesses' referred undoubtedly to the spoken word. But it should be taken as including also the Apostolic message committed to writing, at whatever date, whether in the New Testament or in the Creeds. All alike have behind them the life of the witnessing body. The distinctive value of the witness of the New Testament lies in this, that it reflects the impression made by Jesus on the minds of His contemporaries, whether in their own words or in those of their immediate disciples and successors.

If we are to read the New Testament from this point of view, we should begin with the Epistles. This is the right chronological order. For most of these were written before the Gospels had assumed their present form. But if we are to read the Epistles at all intelligently, we must bear in mind that they are not sermons, or theological treatises, with the partial exception of the Epistle to the Hebrews, but real letters, written to real, living men, and dealing with their actual difficulties and problems. Here, again, we lose greatly by unconsciously treating them as if they had been originally written for the place they occupy in our Bibles, in other words, by tearing them out of their living context. They cannot be understood apart from some knowledge of the circumstances under which they were written, of the needs and thoughts and difficulties of the earliest Christian communities. And it will be all the better if we have also some little acquaintance with that larger life of the Roman Empire within which the young Christian Church grew up. Just in the same way, we could hardly hope to understand a letter which should fall into our hands, if we knew only a little of the writer, and nothing at all of the person addressed, or of his surroundings. We can only regret the name 'Epistle,' which suggests at once to our minds something formal, as a book of the Bible, and try to accustom ourselves to thinking of the 'letters' of S. Paul and the rest. I have laboured this point, for many readers of the Bible do fall into the mistake of regarding these long-preserved letters, so full of vivid, living interest, revealing to us the lives and thoughts of Christians of the first age, as if they were so many 'books' and rather difficult and theological books.

Now, if we regard these old letters as a class, we find a rather wonderful thing. Different as they are in authorship and date and place, one great outstanding feature appears in every one of them, and so gives a peculiar, characteristic stamp to the whole. This feature is the absolutely overwhelming sense, in the background of the mind of each writer, dominating his whole life, of the actual, present life of the ascended Christ.

We will select first a few representative passages, in order to show how familiar and how universal this sense or feeling of the glorified Christ was in the minds of the Christians of that first age. Such reference will make it clear that we have here no special doctrine, peculiar to this writer or that, but a conviction which filled and dominated the minds of writers and readers alike, and which gives us the key to the understanding of what the new religion really meant to them.

Even in what is probably the earliest Christian writing we possess, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, written about A.D. 50, Jesus is habitually spoken of as 'the Lord,' 'our Lord,' the very name used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for Jahweh or 'Jehovah,' the sacred name of God under which He was revealed to Moses, and to Him prayer is offered. 'Now may our God and Father and our Lord Jesus direct our way unto you' (1 *Thess.* iii. 11). We already even while 'waking' (i.e. alive) live with Him (1 *Thess.* v. 10). And both the letters addressed to these Christians of Thessalonica bear witness to the intense expectation of His manifested 'Presence' or coming in glory. We should compare the first form of the Christian Creed in Romans x. 9, 'if thou shalt

confess with thy mouth Jesus is Lord.' But this leading thought, implicit here, becomes explicit in the later letters of S. Paul, and receives magnificent expression. 'He that descended is the same that also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things' (*Eph.* iv. 10). He is 'the image of the unseen God, first-begotten of all creation, because in Him were created all things in the heaven and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or lordships or principalities or authorities, all things have been created through Him and unto Him. And He is before all things and all things in Him hold together, and He is the head of the body, the Church: Who is the beginning, the first-begotten from the dead, that in all things He might become pre-eminent' (*Col.* i. 15–18). Again, we turn to another writer, S. Peter, and there we find that 'Jesus Christ . . . is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject unto Him' (1 *S. Peter* iii. 22). Once more, in that intensely practical and even 'dour' Epistle of S. James, 'Jesus Christ' is 'our Lord' and 'the Lord of glory' (*S. James* ii. 1), an expression which recalls 1 Corinthians ii. 8.

Now, there is no doubt at all, as to the identification, in the thought of the writers, of this glorified Lord with the Man Who had walked in Galilee, and taught in the Temple courts of Jerusalem, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate. That was the very essence of their belief, the fact upon which their lives and those of their readers had come to be based. Nor is there any doubt that this Jesus, exalted 'far above all the heavens,' was yet felt to be in near, intimate, spiritual fellowship with them. 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' (*Gal.* ii. 20). This

twofold belief, in the glory and the closeness of Jesus to them, constituted then, as now, that tone of mind which we recognize as specifically Christian. It is just that attitude to which partial but accurate expression is given in the lines of the hymn :

> Sing we that loving Man
> Who rules the courts of bliss,
> The Lord of Hosts, the mighty God,
> The eternal Prince of Peace.
>
> Filled with the Holy Ghost,
> With love's divine accord,
> We glory in our endless boast,
> The Lord, the Lord, the Lord.

Such, then, is the witness of the Epistles. And, I repeat, it is not the witness of a few old documents, which happen to have been preserved to our own time, but the witness of a spiritual life and consciousness, which in spite of all the forces of wilfulness, corruption, and disunion, still find their expression in the continuous existence and activity of the Christian Church.

But such a life and consciousness did not originate with the teaching of the first missionaries. Thus we are led to the Gospels, which present an account of the origin of the Christian Creed and community in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Here, again, we leave on one side the discussions of critical questions except to notice these few points, all sufficiently familiar. (*a*) In regard to the first three Gospels, the view of their late date, current last century, is now abandoned. No one would be bold enough, for example, to bring them down as late as A.D. 120, and most would assign them, in their present form,

to a date not after A.D. 80 or 90. There is quite good reason for placing Mark before A.D. 70. (*b*) It is certain that the Evangelists are indebted to earlier sources, some oral, some already embodied in writing. In S. Luke's preface we are allowed to see the actual process of making a Gospel. (*c*) The earliest tradition we have, going back to the time of one whom Papias (*c.* A.D. 125) calls 'the elder,' and who was a disciple of our Lord Himself, assigns the origin of our second Gospel to S. Mark's recollections of S. Peter's preaching. On the same authority we learn that S. Matthew 'composed the Oracles in the Hebrew language.' But, fortunately, our present purpose will not lead us into the endless controversy as to the meaning of these last words. I have only noted these very elementary facts to show that our first three Gospels are in any case entitled to rank as excellent historical authorities, in respect of their nearness of date to the events which they record. (*d*) In regard to the Gospel of S. John, nearly all critics, whatever their view of its authorship, would agree in placing it within a few years one side or the other of A.D. 100. I think that this Gospel gives us a true impression of Jesus Christ, true, that is, in its main historical outlines, and, along with this, the result of prolonged meditations of the writer on the significance of His Person and His Teaching. There is a fine picture of its composition, and relation to the Synoptic Gospels as contemporary impressions, in Browning's 'A Death in the Desert.'

Much that at the first in deed and word
Lay simply and sufficiently exposed
Had grown (or else my soul had grown to match
Fed through such years, familiar with such light,

Guided and guarded still to see and speak)
Of new significance and fresh result;
What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,
And named them in the Gospel I have writ.

This is poetry and not criticism, but I know nothing better on the fourth Gospel.

I do not think that, had the Gospels contained the story of an ordinary man, had there been present no miraculous element, any historical student would have found difficulty in accepting them as first-rate authorities. There is at present a certain readiness to regard some of the miracles as genuine facts, perhaps misinterpreted by those who witnessed them, but explicable in terms of our knowledge of the influence of mind over body. Such an explanation cannot apply to such miracles as stilling the storm, or raising the dead. Are we to rule out such narratives as incredible? If we do so, as has been often pointed out, we are practically throwing overboard the whole story, and reducing the Gospel narrative to a myth. For it is not the case here, as it is with certain other lives, that we can eliminate the miraculous as due to the misguided enthusiasm of disciples, and yet retain our confidence in the trustworthiness of the record as a whole. For, in the life of Christ, the miraculous is so closely interwoven with the rest, so much a part of the picture, that, if we rule it out, we leave Him, as has been said, 'a figure as mythical as Hercules.' The Gospels present us with a Christ essentially miraculous, in the physical and moral spheres, 'very man' and yet unlike every other man. We do not necessarily assume the accuracy of every detail. The Evangelists were, on our view, entirely honest historians,

who made the best of the materials before them, and those materials were of the very best, from the historical point of view, the witness of those who had heard and seen (1 *S. John* i. 1 sqq.), but they were not machines, supernaturally prevented from falling into the least error. But this view, also, involves the belief that we have truth, sober everyday truth, in the story which they tell, and not flights of mythological fancy.

Is that story incredible? One great outstanding fact is the perfect harmony of all the Evangelists in what really matters, the picture which they give us of the character of Jesus. Therein consists the true 'harmony of the Gospels,' and not in any attempt to force minor details into agreement. Such attempts are seen to be unnecessary, once we abandon the doctrine of a mechanical inspiration. But it is most difficult to resist the impression of their general and substantial truthfulness, when we find how, by different modes of approach, and from different points of view, they concur in presenting a portrait of a perfectly unique and perfectly consistent human character. Such a portrait would be far beyond the reach of the most imaginative of fiction writers. And whatever else they may have possessed, the quality of imagination strikes us as even singularly lacking in the writers. And here we have four men, independent in their outlook and interpretation of the life they record (this is true, in spite of what seems most probable, the use of S. Mark by S. Matthew and S. Luke), who agree in the same inimitable picture of a life so unlike all other lives of which we have read, or which we have known. And these very differences are essential to, and bound together into, the one perfect whole.

Of course, if no sane person can believe that miracles of the kind alluded to, can ever have happened, there is an end of the discussion. Even then, we are in the presence of an insoluble dilemma. For we have seen that the Gospels produce in us the strong convictions of their general trustworthiness, on the ground of the utterly undesigned consistency with which they portray the character of Christ, and that, at the same time, the miraculous element is so closely interwoven into the substance of the record, that we cannot simply leave it out and content ourselves with what remains.

Without embarking on a long discussion as to the miraculous in general, which cannot be undertaken here, we may notice three very important points.

1. Our modern minds, or imaginations, for I think it is in the latter that our chief difficulty lies, are obsessed by the idea of the uniformity of nature. Now this is an assumption (in more technical language, a postulate) which is the very basis of natural science, without which it could not exist, and which it is every day verifying—in its own domain. Also, we must add, our common life could not be carried on without this same assumption. But there is no ground whatever for further assuming, which is a very different thing, that what we call nature includes the entire universe of being. There is far greater likelihood that it is but one department, or one order, in a far vaster scheme. That some kind of uniformity exists throughout all orders we must hold, it seems to me, if we are to regard God as the Supreme Reason. But it does not at all follow, that the same kind of uniformity as that which can be verified by observations of sense, rules throughout. What we term ' miracles ' may be, for all we

know, perfectly natural events, and perfectly explicable as the results of the working out of law, in the higher, more inclusive sense of that most ambiguous word 'nature.' Here is the old opposition, noted long ago by S. Augustine between 'nature,' in an absolute sense, as embracing all existence, and 'nature as known to us.' Our familiar, in part scientifically known, nature lies as it were in the midst of an illimitable area of being, of which we get now and then some faint glimpses. To take one solitary example. I find it possible to believe in the Virgin Birth of the Incarnate Son of God, while regarding certain biological arguments adduced in its support as futile and misguided attempts to intrude considerations derived from one order of existence into another, and different order. This line of thought must be distinguished from the crude opposition of 'nature' and 'super-nature.' Within the wide compass of nature are many orders, and our 'natural order' is one of them, and not the whole. No one has the right to say certain events, which we call miraculous, cannot happen, or cannot have happened, because they do not fit into the particular order which is known to us.

2. Allied to this, there is a very important consideration. On the Christian hypothesis Christ is true man, belonging to our order. But He is more, the Incarnate Son of God in our manhood. As such, He belongs to another, higher order. And therefore we should find in His life certain phenomena which, from our point of view, are entirely inexplicable. In the same way, if we could suppose a rock or mineral to have the power of thought, the phenomena presented by any living being would be inexplicable. Thus the so-called 'miracles' of

Christ are consistent with what appears to be the structure of the universe. All 'orders' are embraced, we must believe, within a single harmonious whole. But while each lower order is taken up into, and is intelligible from the standpoint of the next higher order, we can never explain a higher order in the terms of a lower. If the doctrine of the Incarnation be true, then, that there should be, in the life of Christ, an aspect which is miraculous from our point of view, is exactly what we should expect. Hence in His case, miracles are, not breaches of natural order, but perfectly natural. They are 'the works of the Christ' (*S. Matt.* xi. 2), works which flow naturally from what He is. But our intellect and imagination alike are trammelled by the limits of our own circumscribed order. So that we are confronted with miracles of Christ which will not and cannot submit to be fitted in with the rest of our knowledge, based, as that is, on observation of the physical world. Only, we must beware, on the one hand, of identifying this order of ours with the entire universe of being, and, on the other, of regarding miracles as breaches of law, as causeless and irregular portents.

3. So much, then, for the miracles of the Gospel in general. They are, as S. John so often calls them, 'signs,' evidences or tokens of what is higher than any form of energy which we can test, or reproduce, namely, the redemptive power of God, actively at work among men in the life of the Incarnate Son. But there is one miracle, to use the familiar term for sake of convenience, on which the Christian faith may be said to depend, in a sense in which it does not depend upon the occurrence of any other miraculous event. We cannot, indeed, as we have seen, entirely eliminate this so-called

'miraculous element' from the records of the life of Christ and continue to regard them as in any sense historically trustworthy. But the account of such miracles must be subjected to the test of historical criticism. And if, in any such case, we should come to the conclusion that what happened can be explained as a 'natural occurrence,' can be brought, that is, within the terms of 'natural law,' no one could say that any damage to the Faith would result. Quite otherwise is the case with the Resurrection of our Lord. Here is not a part of the building, but its very foundation. The writings of the New Testament bear emphatic evidence to this. We learn that the primary qualification of the Apostolic office, was to have seen the Risen Lord, and the primary duty of an Apostle was to bear witness to the fact of the Resurrection. 'Wherefore of the men who have companied with us all the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day on which He was taken up from us, it is necessary that one of these become with us a witness of His Resurrection' (*Acts* i. 21, 22, the words of S. Peter on the election of the successor to Judas). Of all the speeches recorded in the early chapters of the Acts, the burden is 'this Jesus of Nazareth whom you delivered up to be crucified, is Messiah and Lord,' and the proof is made to rest entirely on (*a*) Old Testament prophecy and (*b*) the Apostolic witness to the Resurrection. So, in later years, when S. Paul's position as an Apostle had been challenged, he claims that he possesses at any rate the qualification of having seen the Risen Lord (1 *Cor.* ix. 1).

The greatest testimony to the occurrence of the Resurrection which we have, or could have, is the

present existence of the Christian society which is based upon that foundation, with its age-long observance of Sunday and the Eucharist—of this we have already spoken.

It may be replied, of course, that this only establishes the belief of the earliest disciples in the fact, not the fact itself. This is, of course, true. It has been urged that on no sort of belief in the divine governance of the world, can we imagine that the greatest spiritual influence that the world has ever known, is founded upon a delusion. And there is force in this for all who believe in God, or, what practically comes to the same thing, in the rational ordering of the universe, not less in its moral than in its physical aspect. But it will perhaps be more profitable to try to learn, from the evidence of the earliest documents, how in fact this undoubted belief grew up.

This subject has been dealt with at length in various admirable books, such as Bishop Gore's *Belief in Christ*, Sparrow Simpson's *The Resurrection in the Light of Modern Thought*, and many others. Here, without attempting to cover this familiar ground, we might briefly ennumerate one or two salient points.

(i) The witness of S. Paul in 1 Corinthians xv, written about the year A.D. 55. This is the earliest in point of time. We note specially his reference to ' above five hundred brethren—of whom the greater part remain to the present.' And it has been recently remarked that his use of the name ' Kephas ' for S. Peter points to the derivation of the list from the early Jerusalem Church.

(ii) The accounts in the Gospels of the empty tomb, and the various appearances of the Risen

Christ. The present writer has felt strongly that the differences in the details of the narratives are no mean evidence of their substantial historic truth. They have so very obviously not been revised or written up. And they seem to bear on their face the impress of the disturbance of mind caused by so overwhelming and unexpected an event.

(iii) The entire change of character seen in the Apostles after the Resurrection. They have become in truth different men. They are no longer the men who deserted their Master, who met behind barred doors 'for fear of the Jews.' Instead, they boldly proclaim the Crucified as Christ and Lord, and, being beaten, 'depart from the presence of the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they had been accounted worthy to suffer shame on behalf of the Name' (*Acts* v. 41). Nothing but the strongest conviction, based on what must have appeared to them absolutely certain grounds, could have wrought such a marvellous change.

When we consider the various types of disciples who saw the Risen Christ, the unimaginative and somewhat commonplace minds of the original twelve as revealed in the Gospel history, the nature of the experiences which they are said to have had ('Handle Me and see,' 'who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead'), then, unless we are prepared to throw overboard our existing documents as at any rate honest attempts to record what their writers believed to be facts, we are bound to come to this conclusion that no psychological attempts to account for the original experience as 'hallucination' present even a semblance of plausibility.

Still the question remains, of course, what kind

of fact can we assume to be behind this experience? Are we to suppose, for example, that we have more than visions, not indeed purely subjective, but actually caused by the Spirit of Jesus alive beyond the veil? Or did our Lord truly possess a material, human body in which He appeared to His friends? These are indeed questions not less difficult than important. It will be seen that they involve the problem of 'the resurrection body.'

I think we can give some provisional answer, on such lines as these. The Apostles had the physical experiences, the sense impressions which they are described as having. In no other way could they have attained that degree of conviction which they undoubtedly possessed when they set out to preach the Gospel of the Risen Lord. In no other way can we imagine ourselves being brought to such a belief. But what was beyond the actual cause of these experiences? Such indications as we have, point to the conclusion that our Lord, in His entire Manhood, was now uplifted (to use a metaphor) into the spiritual plane of being. From this plane He was able, at His pleasure, according to laws of which we are ignorant, to re-enter this physical plane and manifest Himself under the old conditions, with certain marked and characteristic changes. These changes are not confined to an apparent freedom from bondage to matter. They extend also to the minds of men. Some degree of spiritual receptivity seems to have been required before He could be recognized. We may doubt whether Pilate or Caiaphas would have been able to see Him.

As to the mode of existence on this spiritual plane, our ignorance is all but complete. But also, and we do well to remember this, we are almost as ignorant

of the true nature of matter. Physical science would seen to be resolving what appears to us to be this hard, impenetrable stuff of which our world is composed, into a mode of energy, ultimately of motion. Under such conditions, we are surely wise to take up an agnostic attitude. It has been well pointed out, that there is such a thing as a Christian agnosticism. If we do not know at all adequately the nature of our material bodies, how can we expect to know in any sense the nature of the spiritual, or resurrection body? The appearances of the Risen Christ indicate some kind of continuity, involving (*a*) the possibility of recognition and (*b*) the retention of experiences undergone in this present state. Such ideas underlie the argument of S. Paul in 1 Corinthians xv. They would appear to be all that is of necessity included in the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. In particular, the Gnostic errors are excluded, that the body is either an evil thing, opposed to the spiritual, or entirely indifferent, so that actions done here in the body do not affect the real personality. The idea of the spiritual body as the perfect expression and instrument of the spirit, is profoundly helpful. But materialistic views of its nature are to be deprecated. We cannot transfer ideas formed from experience of the physical to the spiritual plane. If Christ's entire human nature was preserved and transfigured, and if such is to be the lot of 'those who are Christ's,' that is enough to constitute a true 'Gospel of the Resurrection.'

Looking back, then, on the Gospels as a whole, we may say that they record the first part of the life of the Incarnate Son of God. The whole of the remainder of the New Testament is occupied

with the beginning of the second part of that life, which is still going on, and reaches forward to the end of this world's history. This second part began with the Ascension; it will be closed by the Return. Its keynote is struck by the words of the Risen Christ recorded in the first Gospel: 'Lo, I am with you all the days, unto the consummation of the age.' The Incarnate Son yet lives and continues His ministry among men in His Body, the Church, 'the fullness of Him Who at all points in all men is being fulfilled' (*Eph.* i. 23). The Church, in spite of all its manifold imperfections, represents the ideal humanity, manhood united to God in the Person of the Eternal Word. That view of the Church, which represents it as the extension of the Incarnate Life, can claim the authority of S. Paul, who boldly identifies it with Christ: 'As the body is one and has many members, while all the members of the body, many though they be, are yet one body, so also is the Christ' (1 *Cor.* xii. 12). Thus the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, as we noted before, treats the story which he is going to tell, as the continuation of that which he has already told in the third Gospel, the history of 'those things which Jesus began both to do and teach.' Of the Epistles we have already spoken at some length. They give us the internal aspect of the working of that life in the earliest Christian communities.

We have left to the last that most misunderstood book which occupies the last place in our canon, the Revelation, or Apocalypse of S. John. With the critical questions as to its date, authorship, and composition we are not here concerned, but only with its general character. We may remark that it belongs to a great body of literature, marked by a

strong similarity of style and outlook, of which the earliest example is found in the book of Daniel. The general idea of the whole class of 'Apocalyptic' writings, is the coming, near or distant, of the manifestation of God in power, in order to vindicate His righteousness in the deliverance and exaltation of His chosen servants. The Apocalypse of S. John stands out among them all, as being essentially a Christian reading of history. Like them, it is the product of an age of deep distress and persecution. But it represents, in a series of marvellous pictures, the triumph of the Christ through the ages. So at least we may interpret the essential thought of the writer: He 'comes' in each great crisis of history. Each is in a true sense a 'judgement,' a coming of the Son of Man. But the whole series of partial judgements is to be crowned by a final coming, when 'the kingdom of the world shall have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.' Thus God, in Bishop Gore's fine phrase, 'will come into His own,' in the whole of man's nature and his natural environment.

Thus, the last book, as it stands, in the New Testament, occupies, whatever be its date, its rightful and fitting place. It is the ideal representation of the climax of that life of the Incarnate of which the Gospels tell the beginning, while the Acts and Epistles describe the first stages of the second, and as yet unfinished, chapter.

The New Testament, then, viewing it as a whole, joins its witness to that of general human history, and of the history of the Church, to the reality of the Incarnation of God in the Person of our Lord.

Very briefly, we may gather our threads together.

1. First, we have the revelation of God in nature, as a Person, the Source of its order and beauty.

2. Then, we have His revelation in the minds of men, by the method of inspiration, as Righteousness.

3. Last of all we find Him revealing Himself by the method of Incarnation, in Jesus the Christ, as Love.

Still more shortly, we may put the matter thus. God as personal must (the 'must' lying in the nature of personal being) reveal Himself. And we discover three stages in His progressive self-revelation, namely, (1) Nature, (2) Inspiration, (3) Incarnation.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

I. *Life in the Fellowship.*

SO far I trust we have shown reasonable grounds for believing the conclusions just mentioned: that God is personal and therefore, self-communication being a constant attribute of persons, has revealed Himself to men. In this process of revelation, we have been led to distinguish three stages—Nature, Inspiration, and Incarnation. Thus far, we have been dealing with the intellectual side of our religion. But it is quite clear, I think, that this is a very one-sided statement of the case. It would be a most inadequate view of the relation of God to man, to hold that that relation consisted only, or even chiefly, in imparting to the mind of man true ideas about Himself. Truth, in this sense at any rate, cannot be an end in itself. To separate one side of human nature from the rest, in this case the intellect from the emotions and the will, is not merely a profound mistake, but a moral disaster. True ideas are beyond doubt necessary, but necessary in order that the life of feeling and purpose may be rightly directed. It is possible to lay such exaggerated stress on orthodoxy, right opinion, as to utterly destroy religion, ' Thou believest that God is one. Thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble ' (*S. James* ii. 19).

The purpose of God in dealing with men, in disclosing Himself in successive stages, first as Power, Wisdom, and Beauty, then as Righteousness, and, finally, as Love, can have but one object, to uplift man into fellowship with Himself. It is the claim of the Christian Church, that in her this divine purpose, so far, reaches its fulfilment, through the continuous life and activity of the Ascended Christ by His Spirit. The object of the Incarnation was not merely to reveal God ('He who hath seen Me hath seen the Father'—*S. John* xiv. 9), but to impart a new kind of life to men, 'I came that they may have life, and may have abundance (of life)' (*S. John* x. 10). And we are bound to hold that this is no alien, unnatural life, but that for which man was made, the crown and fulfilment of his nature.

The best method of studying the new life, will be to examine its earliest manifestations and workings in the first Christian communities. For this, we naturally turn to the Acts and the Epistles. The following points become clear, as a result of such study.

1. The life is one lived in a fellowship. It would be no exaggeration to say that this is stamped on every page of these writings. The first Christians 'continued steadfastly in the teaching of the Apostles, and *the fellowship*, in the breaking of the bread, and the prayers' (*Acts* ii. 42). The practical proofs of the reality of the fellowship were (i) that all who believed had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, according as any one had need; (ii) the daily joining 'with one accord' in the Temple services; (iii) the observance of the specifically Christian rite of 'the breaking of bread,' the earliest title of the Eucharist

(*Acts* ii. 44–46). Such is the fascinating picture drawn by S. Luke, from still living memory, of the life of the primitive Christian Church of Jerusalem. The years pass on, and chiefly through the labours of S. Paul, the faith in Christ has reached many of the important centres of the Roman Empire. In the process of its extension it has broken, not without a severe struggle, its Jewish swaddling bonds. But it retains, as its leading characteristic, its primitive character of 'the fellowship.' And in two directions this character has become more explicit and self-conscious, has been marvellously deepened and intensified. (*a*) Its ground is seen to be the union of the whole body of believers with the Christ, its penetration with His heavenly life. This at once involves the union of the members with one another, of such a nature as can most fitly be described by the modern word organic. 'For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, many though they be, are (yet) one body, so also is the Christ; for in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body' (1 *Cor.* xii. 12, 13). The reference to the Spirit will occupy us later. But where could we find a better description of what modern biology has taught us of the nature of an organism? Here is, precisely, what Bishop Chandler in *Scala Mundi* calls the 'whole-and-part relationship' which is the mark of the organic as distinguished from the inorganic world. The whole is such, because it is the expression of a single life. The whole is made up of, and functions through, its parts. Each part has meaning, and even existence, in virtue of the contribution which it makes to and in the life of the whole. The hand is no longer a hand, when it is separated from the body. The

'fellowship' is thus viewed in its source, as the expression of the one life of the Ascended Lord. A man who has been admitted into it, shares in that life, and thereby becomes at once one with Christ and with all other members. His life as a Christian has no meaning or existence save in so far as he shares in and contributes to, the life of the fellowship, so far, in other words, as the one life by which the whole lives and functions in and through him. (*b*) In absolute harmony with this, the virtues, or specific excellencies of the Christian character, are such as serve to promote the life of the fellowship, in short, the social virtues. The 'old man,' the isolated self, with its passions and self-assertive tendencies, which, on the one hand, unfit the man personally for the fulfilment of his part in a fellowship which is morally holy, and, on the other, are the cause of dissension and strife and separation among the brethren, is to be definitely 'put off,' and the 'new man,' the pure and loving manhood of the Christ, must be 'put on' (*Eph.* iv. 17 ; vi. 9). The 'works of the flesh,' once more, the sensual and self-assertive self, are made up of what we call fleshly sins, and also, of such sins as are contrary to the spirit of brotherhood. The 'works of the Spirit,' the principle of the new life of the fellowship, are such virtues as tend to the maintenance of perfect harmony and fellowship in love (*Gal.* v. 19–24). Everywhere it is made clear that the ground of the fellowship is the Risen and Ascended Master. His life permeates the fellowship, thus in fact creating it. No Christian life is possible apart and in isolation from the fellowship, no union with Christ is conceivable which does not at the same time involve union with a man's fellow Christians. Christian morality is the expres-

sion in thought, and word, and act, of the Christ-life which constitutes the fellowship, in a word, of the principle of love, of the one supreme Christian virtue, which includes all the rest, 'agapê.' 'He that loveth his neighbours hath fulfilled the law . . . love therefore is the fulfilment of law' (*Rom.* xiii. 8–10).

But even this is not the final teaching on 'the fellowship' in the New Testament. Some time towards the close of the first century, we have a short writing, the First Epistle of S. John, which exhibits a completely different line of thought, and takes us into even loftier regions of spiritual insight. There the life of the fellowship is seen to be rooted in the Divine Being. The Eternal Life which was with the Father has been manifested in the human life of Jesus of Nazareth. The Apostles, His chosen witnesses, have borne their testimony, based upon their personal intercourse with Him both before ('that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes') and after ('that which we beheld and our hands handled,' cp. *S. Luke* xxiv. 39, *S. John* xx. 27), His Resurrection.[1] The purpose of that testimony is to draw men into the Apostolic fellowship, which is nothing else than fellowship in the life of the Father and the Son. The human love which unites disciples of Jesus has its ground in that eternal union of love which is the very life of the Godhead. God is love, and the source of love. Life in its highest form, which is God Himself, and love are interchangeable terms. The indwelling of God, which is eternal life, is love as the active principle of a man's being, manifested in service and sacrifice. And human service and sacrifice are the counterpart of the divine service and sacrifice, seen

[1] For this interpretation see Gore, *The Epistles of St. John.*

in the Father 'Who hath sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him,' and revealed in the sphere of human history in the complete self-sacrifice of the Son: 'in this have we come to know what love is, because He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.' And all this is made to rest upon the Christian faith in the Incarnation, the acknowledgement of 'Jesus Christ come in flesh,' revealing thus the Life and Love which God is, in the terms of our common manhood. That to which God is everlastingly opposed, and which it was the object of the Incarnation to destroy, is sin, 'the works of the devil,' and the supreme manifestation of sin is hatred, the final form of selfishness. This is what is really characteristic of the devil, and marks his children, those who share in his nature, as love marks 'the children of God.' Sin is therefore opposed to love exactly as death is opposed to life. To be in the Christian brotherhood, is to have passed from death into life, 'We know that we have passed from death into life, because we love the brethren.' Sin, once more, is lawlessness, the contradiction of the true nature of God, and therfore of man, who is made for fellowship with, and likeness to, God. Thus, once more, we are brought to the conclusion, implied though not stated, that life in the fellowship is the fulfilment of man's true being, that for which he was created.

No higher teaching on the subject is found in the New Testament, none can be conceived, than this of S. John, which shows us the Christian fellowship, realized on earth, as rooted in the Eternal Life of God.

Here, then, in this persistent stress in the Apos-

tolic writings of the Christian life as a life lived in the fellowship, is the one and only ideal of the Church. Our task is to make men who profess to believe in the Incarnation, see the ideal, and then bend all their powers towards realizing or restoring it. All kinds and degrees of Churchmanship which, I do not say fail so to realize it, but which deliberately ignore it, are, to use the Johannine phrase, 'not of God but of the devil.' Christianity and the fellowship are convertible terms.

We can scarcely fail to see how wonderfully all this teaching fits in with what is so constantly impressed upon us from outside sources, that man, as an isolated individual, is not yet truly a human person. He can only realize his manhood, only gain genuine personality ('win his soul' in our Lord's phrase) in and through his social intercourse with other men. Man, to be man, must be, and recognize himself as being, a 'social animal.' The Christian doctrine of the fellowship is precisely this teaching raised to the highest level.

II. *The Fellowship and the Spirit.*

We have just seen that the life of the fellowship is grounded in the life of the Ascended Christ. It is His body, living by His life, in which all the members share and by which they are one. On the other hand, quite as clearly, the Apostolic writings also regard the Holy Spirit as the principle of the life of the new community. How are we to reconcile those two points of view, or do they stand in no need of reconciliation?

Let us briefly review the facts, or at least a selection of them. So often does the phrase 'Holy Spirit' (not so frequently 'the Holy Spirit') occur

in the Acts of the Apostles, which describes the origin of the fellowship, that the book has been called the 'Gospel of the Holy Ghost.' We are led to the conclusion that this 'Holy Spirit' is a new force or energy operating in human life and literally creating, and continuing to inspire, the Christian fellowship. This is, of course, in harmony with the saying in S. John's Gospel '(the) Spirit was not yet, for Jesus was not yet glorified' (vii. 39). So the disciples of the Baptist when asked by S. Paul 'Did ye receive Holy Spirit when ye believed?' profess their ignorance, 'Nay, we did not even know that Holy Spirit exists.' Quite certainly, as Jews, they were acquainted with the phrase 'the Spirit of God.' What they were ignorant of was the existence of this new force, the operative force at work in the fellowship (*Acts* xix. 2).

Its coming had indeed been foretold by the Baptist himself, as the culmination of the work which he had begun, and as the distinctive feature of the mission of the Messiah, whose forerunner he was: 'I indeed baptized you with water, but He shall baptize you with Holy Spirit' (*S. Mark* i. 8). And this saying, at the beginning of the Gospel history, is taken up by our Lord at its very close. The promise of the Risen Christ to the Apostles, shortly before the Ascension, was the exact re-echo of the Baptist's words, coupled with the assurance of its speedy fulfilment: 'John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with Holy Spirit not many days hence' (*Acts* i. 5). Such a saying could hardly have stood alone, and its occurrence here leads us to accept as a substantially true record the long discussion about the coming of the Holy Spirit after His departure, which S. John tells us was uttered by our

Lord on the evening before the Passion. And this promise was fulfilled in the experience of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (*Acts* ii. 1–4), which, for this reason, was in fact the birthday of the Christian fellowship. We need not pause to discuss the question of what 'the speaking with other tongues' means. In the opinion of the writer, there is no reason for drawing a distinction between this and 'the speaking with tongues' in the later Apostolic Church, of which we read in Acts x. 46, xix. 6, and, above all, in 1 Corinthians xiv. In all cases where it occurred, it was viewed as a manifestation of the bestowal, or possession of, the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians xiv. 22, S. Paul speaks of it as 'a sign, not to those who believe, but to those that believe not,' and this seems to have been the case on the day of Pentecost. It attracted a crowd to listen to the speech of S. Peter, and we note that there he associates Christian baptism not only with 'the remission of sins' but with 'the gift of the Holy Spirit.' 'About three thousand' were baptized on that day, and so the Christian community began its course. Immediately afterwards comes the reference to their 'continuing in the fellowship' (*Acts* ii. 42). From that point onwards, [the] Holy Spirit appears as the distinctive mark of the Christian body. In Acts viii. 18, xix. 6, it is represented as the endowment which followed the solemn benediction of 'the laying on of hands' upon the newly admitted members. A very important piece of evidence for the way in which the Holy Spirit was regarded as the inward, divine life of the fellowship, is the incident connected with Ananias and Sapphira. There, the attempt to deceive the community is described as nothing less than 'lying against the Holy Spirit.' The actions

of the leaders of the community on critical occasions is ascribed to the special guidance of the Holy Spirit (*Acts* x. 19; xiii. 2; xvi. 6). And it is He Who appoints to ministerial office (*Acts* xx. 28).

It would thus appear that the new principle of life which creates the fellowship and constitutes its unity, is described both as the life of the Ascended Christ, indwelling it as His Body, and as the Holy Spirit, bestowed by the Ascended Lord, according to His promise.

We must remark, in the first place, that as early as Old Testament prophecy (cp. *Joel* ii. 28–32, quoted by S. Peter on the day of Pentecost) a special outpouring of the Spirit of God was regarded as one of the distinctive signs of the days of the Messiah. This is no doubt the reason why the earliest Jewish Church used this term to describe its spiritual experience. It is not, indeed, absent from the later writings. To S. Paul, Christians are those who 'have the first fruits of the Spirit' (*Rom.* viii. 23). The Spirit is the Source of the various endowments of the members of the fellowship (1 *Cor.* xii. 7). The disciples are 'being built together for an habitation of God in (or by) the Spirit' (*Eph.* ii. 22). But it would be roughly true to say that, for him, the Christian fellowship is above all the Body of the Lord, and that its members share in His life. And yet it is to S. Paul that we owe the one phrase which expressly associates the fellowship with the Holy Spirit, for this seems to be the real meaning of the phrase we translate 'the communion of the Holy Ghost' (2 *Cor.* xiii. 14).

In the second place, there is equally no doubt that the same principle of life is meant by the two differing modes of expression. Even if to suppose that

two distinct principles are meant were not absurd, Romans viii. 9, 10 would be conclusive. There S. Paul uses three distinct phrases, 'the Spirit of God dwelling in you,' 'having the Spirit of Christ,' 'Christ in you,' quite obviously to describe the same fact, the new life of the Christian, which he enjoys as belonging to the fellowship.

Can we then say that Christ and the Spirit are identical? that 'Holy Spirit' is only a name for the life of the Ascended Lord? 2 Corinthians iii. 17 seems to support this view. 'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.' But, if this were so, it would be an entirely isolated passage, and at variance with the rest of the New Testament. See Bishop Gore's *Belief in Christ*, pp. 254–5, where reasons are given for explaining and reading the passage thus: 'The Lord, to whom Israel must turn is the Spirit (i.e. the Holy Spirit, now given to the Christian fellowship), and where that Spirit is Lord, there is liberty.'

There can be, as we have said, no doubt that the same central experience of a new life, both in the Christian fellowship and in the individual Christian, is described by two different terms, 'Christ in us' and 'The Spirit of God dwelleth in you.' But the important point is, that while the same experience is denoted, each of the two phrases adds to our knowledge about the new life. They are not to be treated as simply identical in meaning. The first tells us the nature of the life, the second the means of its communication. The two lines of thought meet in that which is, for our purpose, the most crucial passage in the New Testament, Christ's original promise of the Spirit in S. John xiv. 16–18, 'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another

Advocate that He may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of the truth. . . . I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you.' Christ did in fact ' come ' at Pentecost and His Presence in the fellowship is an abiding one. ' Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them ' (*S. Matt.* xviii. 20). ' I am with you all the days unto the consummation of the age ' (*S. Matt.* xxviii. 20). This is, in a true sense, His ' return ' or ' second coming,' whatever further meaning those phrases will be found to have, as indicated in the words ' the consummation of the age.' That coming consisted in the imparting of His life to the fellowship, the unity into which the individual Christian is admitted. This imparting is the direct action of the Spirit of God. He comes upon the Church not merely as the Spirit, but as the Spirit Who was the Creator of the manhood of the Incarnate Son (*S. Luke* i. 35); Who descended upon Him after His baptism (*S. Mark* i. 10 and ff.) to equip Him for His work as Messiah (that is, the Christ, the Anointed by the Spirit), and through whose agency His works as Messiah were wrought (*Acts* x. 38, ' God anointed Him with [the] Holy Spirit and power '). In like manner, He descends upon the believers in Christ, to make them, all together, the Body of the Messiah, living by His life (' ye have anointing from the Holy One . . . and ye shall abide in the Son and in the Father, . . . the anointing which ye received abideth in you ' (1 *S. John* ii. 20, 24, 27). Notice in the passage the mingling of the two currents of thought. The Christian community has the endowment of the Spirit, as He came upon (' anointed ') the Messiah. In close connection with this, it is described (as we noted in the previous section) as living in union

with the Son and the Father. In the later Creed, the reflection of the Church on the work of the Spirit is summed up in the confession of Him as 'the Giver of Life.'

In view of all the facts we have had under review, it will not do to say that 'the Spirit' is merely a Jewish phrase for God as active in the world, or merely a personification, like 'the wisdom' of God. We do not deny, of course, the Jewish origin of the conception, and we bear in mind that the idea of extraordinary powers manifested in individual Christians are, quite in Old Testament fashion, ascribed to the actions of the Spirit. But we seem to have penetrated into that experience of the earliest disciples which was afterwards formulated in the doctrine of the Trinity. We postpone the consideration of this, and once more sum up our results.

The result of the Incarnation is seen, not only in a new conception of God, answering to a new method of revelation, but in the Christian fellowship, which exists for the purpose of raising man to the full height of his nature, in union with the Divine Life itself. This fellowship is constituted by, and has its ground in, the One Life of the Ascended Christ. The Spirit of God, Who was the agent in the Incarnation, is also the agent in the imparting of the life of the Incarnate Son. He Who anointed the Messiah for His ministry, anoints the Body of the Messiah for the continuance of that ministry in a sphere co-extensive with humanity itself. The manifestation of this indwelling Divine Life is the love whereby man becomes morally akin to God. 'God is love, and he who dwells in love, dwells in God and God in him' (1 *S. John* iv. 16).

III. *The Ministry in the Fellowship.*

The Apostles were the first Christian ministers. Nothing is more clear in the Gospel history, than that our Lord's work as Messiah falls into two distinct parts. The first culminates in the confession of S. Peter, 'Thou art the Messiah.' The second is dominated by two great motives, His own and His Apostles' preparation for the coming Passion, and the careful training of the Apostles for their future work. More and more He detaches Himself from the crowd, and gives Himself up to the education of the Twelve. In the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension, this work is still carried on: 'appearing to them during forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.' And His last words are a promise of the coming upon them of the Holy Spirit, Who would give them 'power' to perform the work for which He had chosen and prepared them (*Acts* i. 3–8).

That work was primarily the bearing witness to Himself. The witness of the Apostles to Christ is the foundation upon which the fellowship rests. At first oral, it is for us enshrined in the Gospels and summarized in the Creeds. As the fellowship was to be world-wide, so of necessity must be the witness. 'Ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth' (*Acts* i. 8). Of the part played by the Holy Spirit in this work, we have indications in the Gospel of S. John. He is specifically 'the Spirit of the truth,' and He will 'bring to their remembrance all the things which He 'had said unto them' (*S. John* xiv. 17, 26). As we have already seen, however, the Apostles were,

above all, to bear witness to the fact of the Resurrection (*Acts* i. 22), the fact which was the basis both of the creed and of the life of the fellowship. S. Paul claims that in his case, the essential qualifications of the Apostolic office had been fulfilled in the appearance to him of the Risen Christ. 'Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' (1 *Cor.* ix. 1). The actual call to be an Apostle came to him, he insists, from God and not from man (*Gal.* i. 1). His recognition as such, however, consisted in the older Apostles extending to him 'the right hand of fellowship' (*Gal.* ii. 9). On the same occasion, the same recognition was given to Barnabas, who is also called an Apostle (*Acts* xiv. 14). Besides their primary task of bearing witness, the Apostles were to exercise disciplinary powers in the Church: 'whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven' (*S. Matt.* xviii. 18; cp. xvi. 19). Here 'binding' and 'loosing' are used in the well-known Jewish sense, of declaring what acts were unlawful or lawful for members of the community. The power of remitting or retaining sins (*S. John* xx. 23), will at any rate include the power of expulsion from the community, and re-admission on penitence, that is, the 'power of the keys' (*S. Matt.* xvi. 19). But it remains doubtful whether this gift was bestowed on the Apostles alone, as, according to S. Luke xxiv. 33, others were assembled with them.

The records of the earliest Church, in the Acts and Epistles of S. Paul, exhibit the Apostles as exercising all their functions of witness and of discipline. They also exhibit them as (i) ratifying the admission of new members by the laying on of

hands, with which is associated the new gift of 'Holy Spirit' (vide *Acts* viii. 17; xix. 6), and (ii) with the same act of benediction, the imposition of hands, admitting men to office in the community. The first recorded instance of this appointment of other ministers, is that of 'the Seven' in Acts vi. 6. Their office was to attend to the business affairs of the Church, and on this account they have been considered, usually but not universally, the prototypes of the 'deacons' of later days. But a more important office appears in Acts xiv. 23, when Paul and Barnabas appoint 'presbyters' or 'elders' in each of the Churches founded in the first missionary journey. The title is borrowed from the Jewish synagogue, and the obvious intention was the creation of officers to direct and supervise the life of the local community. But already there were 'elders' in the Church of Jerusalem (*Acts* xi. 30) who received the alms sent from Antioch 'by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.' In this mother Church of Christendom, the elders appear side by side with the Apostles in the first Council of the Church, summoned to consider the all important question of the terms on which the new Gentile converts were to be admitted (*Acts* xv *passim*), and as joint authors, with them, of the decree of the council (*Acts* xvi. 4). And the persons who officially welcome S. Paul on his last visit to Jerusalem, were James, the Lord's brother, who appears to have ranked with the Apostles (*Acts* xv and *Gal.* ii. 9), 'and all the elders' (*Acts* xxi. 18). There does not seem real reason to doubt that to these officers the Greek title of 'Episcopoi' or 'overseers' ('bishops') was also given. Thus S. Paul summons the elders of the Church of Ephesus to Miletus (*Acts* xx. 17),

and in his address to them bids them 'give heed to the flock, in which the Holy Spirit' had placed them 'as bishops.' Elder and bishop are clearly identified in Titus i. 5–7, where a list of the moral qualifications of an elder is followed by 'for the bishop must be blameless, as God's steward.' It is natural to think that the 'bishops and deacons' of Philippi (*Phil.* i. 1) would probably, in the case of a Palestinian Church, be addressed as 'elders and deacons.' But the elders appear under other names as well. They are 'those who preside over you in the Lord,' of 1 Thessalonians v. 12, the 'leaders' of Hebrews xiii. 24, and, in all probability 'the shepherds and teachers' of Ephesians iv. 11. With this last passage, compare 1 Timothy v. 17, 'let the elders who preside well, be accounted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in word and teaching.' Elders appear in the Churches of Asia Minor, whom S. Peter addresses as his 'fellow-elders,' and, quite in the fashion of S. Paul's address to the Ephesian elders, or bishops, bids them 'tend the flock of God which is among them.'

Thus the elders appear as the governing body in each local Christian community. As far as we can make out, they were also known as bishops, or overseers, a name descriptive of their functions, just as they could be called 'presidents' or 'leaders.' But they would more naturally be elders in a Jewish, bishops in a Greek Christian Church. Whether there were elders to whom the title bishop would not be applied, whether it is true, of Apostolic times, that, while all bishops were elders, all elders were not necessarily bishops, is a question which we have simply no means of deciding. Thus we have, in each local Church, a governing body of elders

(bishops) assisted (in all cases or in some?) by deacons. For this latter see Philippians i. 1, already referred to, and 1 Timothy iii. 8–12. Above these, the representatives and witnesses of Christ for the whole fellowship, and the source of every kind of authority and ministry therein, are the Apostles, both the Twelve, and later members of the Apostolic College, as SS. Paul and Barnabas. But, sooner or later, the question had to be faced, by whom, or by what arrangement, were the elders or bishops to be appointed, how, in other words, was the government of the Church to be carried on when the Apostles had been removed by death? We can see S. Paul's way of solving this question, from the Pastoral Epistles. There we find Titus has been left behind by the Apostle in Crete, and one of the purposes for which he has been left is 'to establish elders in every city,' just as S. Paul himself and S. Barnabas had appointed 'elders in every Church' on the first missionary journey (*Titus* i. 5; *Acts* xiv. 23). Timothy, in like manner, has been 'exhorted to tarry in Ephesus,' and one of his tasks there is to ordain elders by laying on of hands as the Apostles in the earliest days had done to the Seven at Jerusalem (1 *Tim.* v. 22), and another is to exercise supervision and discipline over them when appointed (1 *Tim.* v. 17–19). Quite unmistakably both Timothy and Titus are no mere elders or bishops, but representatives and delegates of S. Paul in his Apostolic office, both in ordaining elders, and in exercising discipline —both over them and over ordinary members of the Church. In the case of Timothy, S. Paul lets us see that he had himself solemnly appointed him to this office: he reminds him 'to stir up the gift

that is in thee by the laying on of my hands' (2 *Tim.* i. 6). The body of elders indeed had been joined with S. Paul in this act, but, as the difference in the Greek proposition shows, the delegation of Apostolic power proceeded from the Apostle alone (1 *Tim.* iv. 14. In this passage, the obscure phrase 'by prophecy' may mean that Timothy was pointed out as called to this office, by the prophets of the Christian community, or it may refer to an extemporary prayer at his ordination.) Thus every local community in the first age was closely connected, through its ministry of 'elders' or 'bishops,' with the Apostles. This connection was twofold: (i) it formed an integral part of the one great Christian fellowship of which they were the founders, so it participated in the One Life of the Ascended Christ and the gifts of His Spirit; (ii) it was secure in its possession of the genuine Christian tradition, of which they were the first 'witnesses.' In other words, Christians of Corinth or Ephesus or Rome, not less than the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem at the very beginning, 'continued in the Apostles' doctrine and the fellowship.' It remains to find out what arrangements the Apostles made, if any, for securing the continuance of the ministry, and with it, the oneness of the Christian Church and the preservation of the original Christian Creed. We might here refer, at any rate by way of illustration, to the famous passage in Ephesians, chapter iv, where S. Paul brings into connection the unity of the Church, 'one Body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism,' with the idea that the Christian ministry is the gift, to the Church, of the Ascended Christ: 'He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and

teachers, with a view to the perfecting (equipment) of the saints unto a work of service, unto the building up of the body of the Christ' (*Eph.* iv. 4, 5, 11, 12).

This question of the mode of continuance of the ministry in post-apostolic times, is most unfortunately a controversial one, and has led in relatively modern times, and especially among English speaking Christians, to sharp divisions between those who hold the same faith, and own the same Lord. It is, we all know, at the root of the separation between 'Church' and 'Nonconformists.' So the tragic result has followed, in regard to the Apostolic ministry, as in regard to the Eucharist, that that which was, in its original intention, the bond of union between all Christians, has become the very cause of disunion and unbrotherly strife. The heavenly treasure, committed by the Lord to His Church, is contained in earthern vessels, lodged with men full of infirmity and passion. But it is a hopeful sign that even such burning questions can in our days be handled in a calm and dispassionate spirit, with the desire, on either side, to arrive at the truth and to regain the unity which is not merely advisable, but essential if we are to revive in its fullness the ideal of the Church as the Apostolic fellowship, 'preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (*Eph.* iv. 3). The contention of the present writer is, that while the oneness of the fellowship has its roots in the common sharing in the One Life of the Ascended Christ, and in the One Spirit He has outpoured on His Church, the outward and visible sign and means of that inward and spiritual unity is to be found now, as in the first days, in the Apostolic ministry, meaning by

that, a ministry which can trace its origin back to the Apostles, which is therefore universal in its scope, and can speak with their authority. After all, such a view is only a particular application of the principle, inherent in human nature, and consecrated by the Incarnation, that on this our earthly plane of experience, matter and spirit are indissolubly joined.

It is obviously impossible to treat the question of the development of the Christian ministry in post-Apostolic days, which has been discussed by writers of first-rate ability, in so many volumes, at any length in this place. I would refer the readers who may be interested, to the book of essays called *The Early History of the Church and the Ministry*, edited by the late Professor Swete, a series of most learned and able discussions, by well-known authors. But two or three salient points may be selected, as helping us to form a judgement on the matter.

(i) First, we have the well-known passage in the letter of Clement of Rome to the Church of Corinth, the earliest Christian writing, with one possible exception, outside the New Testament, dating A.D. 95–100. The occasion of writing was the expulsion of certain elders, or presbyters, from their office, not from any fault of theirs, but apparently in the course of some internal dispute. Clement writes to Corinth in the name of the Roman Church, to urge counsels of peace and concord, and, in particular, the restoration of the presbyters unjustly deposed. What is particularly to the point for our present discussion, is the passage alluded to and now to be quoted, where he refers the origin of the Christian ministry to the Apostles. 'Our Apostles knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be

strife concerning the name of the bishop's office. On this account, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed the afore-mentioned (referring back to *c.* A.D. 42, " in every city and place they appointed the first fruits of their labours, having proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should believe "), and afterwards they made a further arrangement (or, gave permanence to the office) that, when they should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. Those, then, who were appointed by them (i.e. the Apostles) or afterwards by other men of note, with the consent of the whole Church, and ministered blamelessly to the flock of Christ . . . these we deem to be unjustly expelled from the ministry ' (Clem. *Rom.* 44).

Here we notice two points: (1) the Apostles made arrangements for a due succession in the ministry, and (2) after their decease bishops and deacons were appointed by ' other men of note,' that is, apparently, men like Timothy and Titus. This seems the most natural interpretation of the passage.

(ii) There are few early Christian remains more fascinating than the letters written to various Churches by S. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (*c.* A.D. 112), on his way to Rome to be torn by the wild beasts in the Coliseum. They are extremely important, among other things, for the light they throw on the ministry of the early Church. Here we see established in the Church of Asia Minor, the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyters, and deacons. The differentiation of bishop from presbyter is complete, and the bishop is limited in his jurisdiction to one city and possibly the surrounding

district. There, he represents the unity of the Christian fellowship. Where the bishop is, S. Ignatius teaches, there is the Catholic Church, the universal fellowship represented by the local community. As Clement emphasizes the idea of succession, so does Ignatius that of unity. And this has bearing on the sacramental life of the fellowship, with which we deal in the following section. That, and that alone, is to be esteemed a 'valid Eucharist' which is celebrated by, or under the sanction of, the bishop.

It is curious to reflect, that this momentous step, the substitution of the one bishop in the local Church for the Apostolic delegate, such as Timothy or Titus, or the 'men of note' of S. Clement's Epistle, and his separation from, and authority over, the presbyters, took place, at any rate in Asia Minor, within some twelve or twenty years, and that we are largely in the dark why and how so far-reaching a change, which has persisted in its results all down the history of the Church, took place. But the darkness is illuminated for us, it may be, by the ancient tradition preserved by Clement of Alexandria, that the Apostle S. John ordained local bishops in districts of Asia Minor.

(iii) The writers of the second century, above all S. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (*c.* A.D. 180), lay most emphatic stress on the preservation of the pure Christian tradition in the various Churches, derived from the Apostles, by whom, or by whose disciples, they were founded, through the succession of their bishops. It is in this form that the idea of the 'Apostolic succession' makes its first appearance in history. This was the great argument of the Catholic teachers against their opponents, the Gnos-

tics, who advanced the view of a hidden 'knowledge,' or esoteric teaching handed down by the Apostles to select individuals and so to themselves. The ministry—through the recorded succession of bishops—thus appears as preserving, and divinely intended to preserve, the original Apostolic witness. 'We can show,' writes S. Irenaeus, 'to any one whose eyes are open to the facts, this tradition from the Apostles in manifest form in every Christian community throughout the world; we can give the names of the bishops whom the Apostles appointed in the several Churches, with the lists of their successors from that day down to this; and no one of them thought or taught anything like the fantasies of the Gnostics.' He then, by way of illustration, refers to the instance of the Roman Church, the bishop at the time of writing, Eleutherus (*c.* A.D. 175–190), is the twelfth in succession from the Apostles.

S. Irenaeus is only an example of the view held by the great Christian teachers of the second century, namely, that the recorded successions of the bishops from the Apostles, in the principal centres of Christendom, guarantee the purity of the doctrine which they taught. This is the earliest form in which 'Apostolic succession' makes its appearance.

We may, then, briefly summarize what we have learnt as to the place of the ministry in the life of the Christian fellowship.

1. While we cannot accept as literal truth the statement of the English ordinal that 'from the Apostles' time there have been these three orders of ministers in the Church, bishops, priests, and deacons,' we may yet recognize that the germs of the later threefold ministry are to be found in the

New Testament, and that the development has been a natural, we might say, an inevitable one. And if we believe that the life of the Church is the Spirit of the Ascended Christ, it seems reasonable also to believe that the course of her history, in so essential a matter, has not been apart from His guidance.

2. The idea early finds expression that the ministry as such is not a purely human creation, but owes its origin to the Lord. S. Paul already, as we saw, regards the various 'orders,' as they came to be called, from the Apostles down to the 'shepherds and teachers' as His gift to the Church (*Eph.* iv. 11, 'He Himself gave . . . ').

3. The purpose of this gift of the ministry, the Apostle, in the same passage, declares to be 'the building up of the Body of Christ.' Our very brief review of the first two centuries has shown us two ways in which the ministry conduced to this result.

(*a*) It secured the permanence of the Apostolic tradition, the preservation of that 'witness' of the Apostles which was their primary function, and on which the Church is founded.

(*b*) Scarcely less important was the service effected by the bond of union between the separated Christian communities constituted by the presidency of bishops who traced their appointment ultimately to the Apostles. The Christian fellowship, as has been pointed out, was one by reason of the sharing in One Life and One Spirit. But the outward expression of that internal unity was of the utmost importance, and was found in the existence everywhere of a ministry of a fundamentally common type, and of a common origin. And it seems true, that the Apostolic ministry of to-day does exercise to a large

extent the same functions, and that, in spite of our most unhappy divisions, the threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons does help to preserve a certain common type of Christian thought and discipline. The action of the Spirit is not, and never has been, limited to definite channels, even of divine appointment (*S. John* iii. 8), but, after making what allowance one can for individual lives, it is difficult to resist the impression that those bodies of Christians who altogether discard the idea of an 'Apostolic succession,' in the sense in which, for example, it was held in the second century, have suffered a serious loss. And, as might be expected from the nature of the fellowship, such loss is not confined to themselves, but reacts on those from whom they have separated.

IV. *The Sacramental Life of the Christian Fellowship.*

Here, again, we find ourselves on controversial ground. But the subject, it seems to the writer, presents, on the whole, fewer thorny perplexities than that which we have just discussed. For I do not see how, in spite of certain modern opinions, it can be doubted that the two great sacraments, Baptism and the Holy Communion, observed by Christians from the earliest time of which we have any record, owed their origin to Christ Himself. If we are to attach any historical value at all to the Acts of the Apostles, Baptism was from the first the means of admission into the fellowship (*Acts* ii. 38, 41), and, while the earliest Christians joined in the worship of their fellow Jews, they were distinguished by one rite of their own, 'the breaking of the bread' (*Acts* ii. 42, 46; xx. 7, 11). This fact is very strong

evidence for the trustworthiness of the statements in the Gospels that both owe their origin to the Founder of the Church.

It would be clearly impossible here to discuss all the questions which have been raised in connection with the two great Christian sacraments. Our task is to try to make out, from the evidence we possess, their place and function in the life of the fellowship. But one preliminary remark may be made as to the principle which underlies them both. That principle, which may be very shortly stated as 'matter the expression and the instrument of spirit,' appears to be one of the most extended application. If we believe, as we saw reason to believe, that the unity, order, beauty, and rationality, of the universe, are due to the fact that it has its origin, and owes its existence, to One Supreme Spirit, then the universe is itself the greatest of sacraments. For, on that view, matter has its ultimate meaning as the expression and the instrument of the creative and indwelling God. If we believe, as again we saw reason to believe, that the Incarnation is the highest manifestation of His revealing activity, then the Incarnate Life is a sacrament of which 'the outward and visible sign' was the human Body of the Lord, with all its varied energies in word and act. And, indeed, there is an illustration nearer home. Our own material organism is at once the expression and the instrument of our self, or spirit, which feels and thinks and wills, and uses our body to manifest its feelings, to give utterance to its thoughts, to execute its will. Thus the sacraments of the Gospels are but special applications of a world-wide principle, and owe their distinctiveness only to their connection with the Person of Christ. As sacra-

ments, they are symbols, and more, effective symbols (bringing into actual operation the truths for which they stand), of the spiritual energy which proceed from Him. On this view, Baptism represents the cleansing power of His life on men's hearts and consciences, and to the believing soul conveys that cleansing, the beginning of a new life. 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature' (2 *Cor.* v. 17). The Body and Blood of Christ represent Him, the enbodied Divine Life and Love, as the food of man's spiritual being, and sustain, as such, the new life in the soul of the Christian man. 'He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath eternal life' (*S. John* vi. 54), the life which is present and actual, and over which death has no power. It is as used in this way, directed to this end, by the faith and the prayers of the Church, co-operating with the Holy Spirit, that the simple elements of bodily sustenance and refreshment, bread and wine, are brought into connection with Him, and both represent and effect His Presence in the midst of the assembly of believers, and His support and stay of the soul of the individual believer.

There have been remarkable anticipations of both the great Christian sacraments in other religions. These are valuable, though indirect, helps to our faith. For they show 'a soul naturally Christian' in remote times and amid strange surroundings and habits of thought. Christianity is the divine answer to the human need, expressed in manifold ways, but with an even weird similarity underlying its expression, to find fulfilment of all that heart and mind desire in communion with God; and the divine corroboration of the age-old idea that such communion may be gained, not so much in the

ecstasy of the mystic, as through the consecration of the things of earth.

But now we return to our proper subject. What was the real significance of Baptism and the Eucharist in the life of the Christian fellowship?

1. Our answer lies on the surface of our records. Both sacraments are in their essence and meaning social institutions. Baptism is the admission into the body of believers, which is also, in high and mystical and most true sense (by virtue of the new life therein imparted), the Body of the Christ. 'For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body, many though they be, are one body, so also is the Christ: for in one spirit were we all baptized into one body' (1 *Cor.* xii. 12, 13).

The Eucharist was the common meal of the brotherhood. It did not merely symbolize their unity with each other, but was a continual new creation thereof, by a renewal of their union with the one Lord.

On the one hand, 'the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a fellowship in (joint partaking of) the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a fellowship in the Body of Christ?' And, on the other hand, in consequence of this, 'One bread, one body, are we the many, for we all partake of the one bread' (1 *Cor.* x. 16, 17). There is a very ancient Christian document, 'The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,' belonging, as perhaps most scholars believe, to the second century, in which this social character of the Eucharist is strongly emphasized. In this work, certain prayers are given, which are to be said at the celebration, whether by the celebrant or by the congregation is uncertain.

That 'over the broken bread,' contains the following petition: 'As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom.' The many scattered ears of corn have a unity in the consecrated loaf, which sacramentally represents the unity of the Church. One is tempted to think that a similar idea may underlie that most ancient ritual act, common to all liturgies from the very beginning, the actual breaking of 'the one bread' followed by its distribution to the many communicants.

Connected with this thought, is the parallel which S. Paul draws between the Christian Eucharist and the sacrificial feasts of heathen rites. These, too, were regarded as promoting the union of the worshippers both with the god and with each other. The same conception was present in the Jewish peace-offering (1 *Cor.* x. 18). This passage, by the way, illustrates the sense in which we may maintain the sacrificial character of the Christian Eucharist.

Thus the two great 'sacraments of the Gospel,' it is not too much to say, are rooted in the life of the Christian fellowship, and have meaning as related to that life. The one admits into the fellowship, the other nurtures and deepens the common life. Both alike are material channels through which the spiritual energy of the Ascended Lord flows into His Body, quickening and nourishing it. And as the fellowship has both inward reality, in its hidden and divine life of love and service, and an outward manifestation, as a visible organization of human beings, so surely it is fitting that its rites should be of the same twofold character, in

other words, sacramental. Christianity, because it is more than a theory, or a vague aspiration after goodness, but is, on the contrary, the Divine Life come down to earth and revealing itself under material conditions, must be essentially a sacramental religion.

One may here hazard the remark, that modern Churchmanship suffers a grievous loss by its almost total neglect of this social character of the sacraments. Even in the case of those who hold strongly to the sacramental idea, Baptism and Holy Communion are regarded as conferring benefits upon the individual soul, and are thus separated from the primary Christian thought that we are pledged to the life of love and service, realized in the fellowship, and that it is in this context that the sacraments, as we said, have meaning. A communion service, in any branch of the Church, would gain enormously in spiritual efficacy, if it were viewed in the light of that great teaching: 'One bread, one body, are we the many, for we all partake of the one bread.'

2. It is to be noted, that as the sacraments are regarded as marks of the spiritual action of the Ascended Christ, so stress is laid on the necessity, in those who receive them, of the appropriate spiritual response. Here the analogy is exact, between His sacramental action, and His miracles of healing recorded in the Gospels. 'He could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief.' 'Thy faith hath made thee whole.' So repentance and faith are demanded of those who are to be baptized (*Acts* ii. 38; viii. 37. The latter passage is good evidence, though an early interpolation, as showing the mind of the early Church.) And

careful self-examination is required before reception of the Holy Communion (1 *Cor.* x. 28). The contrast is complete, between magic and the sacramental idea in its Christian form. For magic is, essentially the attempt, by word and action, usually by both combined, to compel the mysterious powers of the universe to subserve one's own individual ends, such ends being far from spiritual in character. In the sacraments we have indeed the idea of a power other than human, but such power is spiritual in its character and aim, and is granted in response to a certain spiritual condition in the recipients. There are the appropriate words and actions, but the notion of compelling the power to act, which is of the essence of the magical, is absent, in fact is replaced by the contrary idea of supplication or prayer, which is of the essence of the religious action.

It is by no means the fault of the sacramental system that in some cases it has been contaminated with the idea of magic. This is bound to happen, when its connection with the life of the Christian fellowship is forgotten, and it is hence dissociated from Christian love and service. In general, though the remark needs some qualification, religion has always been social and magic individualistic. Such contamination of the sacramental idea with the magical, which is, as we have seen, utterly and inherently opposed to it, may be observed in the case of baptism. Infant baptism, which at least dates from the second century, may rightly be defended if we strongly emphasize the relation of the sacrament to the faith and love of the Christian community. It was a beautiful idea, that the child of Christian parents had a right to all the privileges of the household of

God, and from the earliest dawn of understanding should be taught to realize his position and his duties as a son in his Father's house. But this idea is entirely lost when he is brought to baptism by parents whose connection with the life of the Christian fellowship is of the slightest, or even non-existent, and when baptism itself is regarded as a mere form, with which it is respectable to comply. We have left behind, in such cases, the sacramental idea, and are at least on the threshold of magic. The threshold is crossed, decisively, when baptism is regarded as a means of conveying physical benefit to the child, a notion not uncommon among the more ignorant. One questions whether baptism should not be postponed, not infrequently, to an age when the child can understand what is meant by accepting Christ as Lord, and followed immediately, as in primitive times, by confirmation.

In the case of the Eucharist, there is somewhat less danger of the magical idea. The objective presence of Christ is held to be granted in response to the prayer and faith of the Church as a whole, of which the celebrant is the representative, even if the celebrant on any occasion be unworthy. It would be obviously unjust that the faithful should suffer in such a case. Nor does it seem rational to hold that the presence depends on the faith of the communicant, for that would be to separate the sacrament from the life of the fellowship. Calvinistic and Zwinglian ideas of the Eucharist in the long run tend to produce an individualistic type of religion, which, whatever genuine piety it exhibits, falls short of the fullness of the Christian ideal. On the other hand, we have seen with what insistence S. Paul lays down that the benefits of communion

depend upon the spiritual response of the communicant.

Thus the sacramental system is spiritual throughout. That in definite ways the working of the Spirit is conditioned by a material medium is in harmony, as we have observed, with the structure of the universe, with the principle of the Incarnation, and with the constitution of man. Nor does it conflict with the truth that the Spirit, like the wind with which it is compared, 'bloweth where it listeth' (*S. John* iii. 8), and that 'God is not bound by His own sacraments.' But the New Testament does make it plain that the sacraments are not mere appendages of the Christian religion, but integral to the life of the Christian fellowship.

V. *The Ministry and the Sacraments.*

We have already seen that the ministry in the form in which it is familiar to us—the local bishop with his priests and deacons—developed at an early date (differing no doubt in different parts of the Church) from the state of things which we find in the New Testament. This development was governed by the two main principles (*a*) of preserving the unity of the fellowship, (*b*) of keeping the tradition of the faith received from the Apostles, pure and undefiled. The special urgency of the first, lay in the danger of the fellowship being broken up into a number of separated local centres: of the second, in the necessity of combating various types of Gnostic heresy, especially in view of the Gnostic assertion of a secret, esoteric teaching derived from the Apostles, and handed down in select circles, apart from the main, public line of tradition. Both of these dangers, which threatened the life of the

Church in the second century, were met by the system of episcopal government. The very essence of that system lay in the fact that it supplied the link between the Church of the present, and the Church of the Apostles. Of the function of the episcopacy in preserving the tradition of the Apostolic teaching, we have already spoken. Its other function, that of preserving unity, is ultimately, although not solely, connected with the administration of the sacraments, particularly of the Eucharist. For that was especially the sacrament of unity. It was already, in Apostolic times, as noted above, recognized as such. And this aspect of it came greatly into prominence in the struggles of the second century. There was found the bond which connected the local centres of the Universal Church. But, in order that it might be felt and known as such, there must be a link which connected each celebration both with all other celebrations in any part of the world, and with the primitive, Apostolic community to which all the Churches looked as their origin. The unity of the Church must transcend differences both of space and time. Such a link was found in the episcopacy, descended from the Apostolic ministry, and established in each local congregation. So we find that the bishop was recognized as the proper minister of the Eucharist. When he was unable to be present, then the celebrant must be one to whom he delegated his authority, that is, one of the presbyters. 'Let that be esteemed a valid Eucharist,' writes S. Ignatius (A.D. 112), 'which is under the bishop, or him to whom he shall commit it.' So it was, naturally, in the case of the other sacraments. The same writer goes on to say, 'it is not lawful, apart from the bishop, to baptize.'

While, under episcopal authority, other ministers of the Church performed the various functions necessary for its continued existence, and even a layman could baptize, the right to ordain and to confirm was confined to the bishop. In this connection, it may be of interest to quote a portion of the earliest known prayer at the consecration of a bishop, from the beginning of the third century: 'Thou, Father, Who knowest the hearts of all men, grant to this Thy servant, whom Thou hast chosen to the episcopate, that he may feed Thy holy flock, and execute the high priesthood unto Thee, blamelessly ministering night and day; and that he may unceasingly propitiate Thy countenance and offer Thee the gifts of Thy holy Church (i.e. the Eucharistic gifts): that he may by the high priestly spirit have authority to forgive sins according to Thy precept . . . and to loose every bond according to the authority Thou gavest to the Apostles.'

Thus the function of the ministry in relation to the sacraments, is governed by the idea that the episcopacy, representing the authority of the Apostles, as well as the tradition of the faith derived from them, is the great safeguard and guarantee of the unity of the Church. As the Eucharist is the sacramental expression of that unity, it was natural that the bishop should be regarded as its normal celebrant, and that no one should be recognized as being empowered to celebrate, except a presbyter who derived his authority from ordination by the bishop. Hence every Eucharist was in some sense continuous with the Eucharist as celebrated by the Apostles, and, at the same time, however small might be the congregation, could be regarded as the act of the whole Church.

In this chapter, we have touched from time to time on points which might be amplified almost indefinitely, and some of which have been, and are, subjects of burning controversy. It may be well then to sum up our main points in one or two sentences. The Incarnation was not only the supreme self-revelation of God, it was and is, essentially a creative act. That which it creates is a fellowship of men and women, commonly called the Church, which is the Body of Christ, for its bond of union is the One Life of the Ascended Lord, bestowed first at Pentecost, and continuously since, by the Spirit Who dwelt in Him as the informing power of His Manhood. The one purpose of this fellowship is the manifestation, in a social medium, for in no other way could it be manifested, of the perfect human life, the life of love, shown in sacrifice and service. As the fellowship exists on earth under material conditions, the divine life which animates it, finds its expression and channels of communication, in outward institutions, in an organized ministry, and in sacraments, which are yet far more than outward, just as a man is more than his body, which is yet the symbol of his living spirit and the organ of its activity. The final end or purpose of the fellowship is to attract all men into its own divine human life, and so, ultimately, to raise mankind to God, thus accomplishing the divine purpose in the human creation. We may reverse the order of our thought. As the Church is the natural issue of such an act of God as the Incarnation, so, as it has existed through the centuries, and still exists, it constitutes, as an undeniable historic fact, the most valuable evidence for the central truth of the Christian faith: 'The Word became Flesh, and dwelt among us.'

CHAPTER VII

THE ATONEMENT

ACCORDING to the New Testament, before a man can enter the fellowship a radical change must take place in his character. He must be 'born again' or 'from above' (*S. John* iii. 3) before he can 'see the kingdom of God.' The natural man, he who is 'in the flesh,' must come to be 'in the spirit' before he can 'please God' (*Rom.* viii. 8). He needs to be 'reconciled to God' (*Rom.* v. 10.) This change is viewed from two distinct points of view. From that of the activity of the man himself, it is a 'change of mind' (already in *S. Mark* i. 15), somewhat unfortunately, perhaps, translated 'repentance.' From the point of view of God, it is the act by which He 'reconciles' man to Himself, 'through' or 'in' Christ (2 *Cor.* v. 18, 19). In our English speech, 'reconciliation' is sometimes rendered 'atonement,' or the process by which man becomes 'at one' with God.

Thus the atonement stands in clear connection with the fellowship. In discussing it in this place, therefore, we are following where the subject leads us. And, in any case, we are bound to deal with it, for few tenets of our faith present more difficulties to the average believer. And it is of great importance to notice that, not only in this case, doubtless, but pre-eminently in this case, the really great difficulties arise, not from the doctrine itself, but from its perversion and misrepresentation.

Let us consider how in the past, and to some extent even now, it has been and is misrepresented. God has been regarded as angry with the sins of mankind, but His anger has been appeased by the death of Christ, so that He is ready to accept us on this ground, if only we believe that Christ died for us. This is crudely put, but I am inclined to think most of us have met with some such statement. Without hesitation, it can be at once stated that this is a horrible and grotesque travesty of Christian doctrine.

1. The conception which it involves of God, falls below the best heathen thought of Him, infinitely below His revelation in Christ as the Father in heaven. How could our worship, and service, and love be directed to a being so profoundly immoral as to demand the 'punishment' (some have not hesitated to go as far as this) of an innocent victim as the condition of pardoning the guilty? What should we think of a human ruler who acted thus? Our minds irresistibly recall the saying of John Stuart Mill, that he could call no being good, who was not so in the same sense in which he applied the word to his fellow creatures, and, if God could send him to hell for not so calling him, to hell he would go. The sentiment is absolutely Christian. For if we are convinced of one thing, it is that all human virtues, of which justice is one of the most important, must exist in God in their highest perfection. And few, if any, errors we can make, are more flagrant than that of attributing to God conduct from which our moral sense, which we dare to believe is implanted in us by Himself and reflects His mind, utterly revolts.

2. In any case, the teaching in question is alien

from the letter and the spirit of the New Testament. Throughout, the suffering and death of our Lord are represented as due to His loyal fulfilment of duty, or to His love for man, or to the act of wicked men (*Phil.* ii. 8; 1 *S. John* iii. 16; *Acts* ii. 23), never once as a 'punishment' inflicted by God. In whatever sense they were foreknown, or determined, as the last passage seems to say, they were not so otherwise than as the death of a hero who leads a desperate enterprise can be so described.

3. The connection between sin and suffering is certainly not what this theory implies. That sin must in the end bring suffering, every Christian believes, and every enlightened Christian holds with S. Augustine that the worst punishment of sin is sin itself, the degradation of the self, the deterioration of character which it inevitably involves. That sin brings disorder into the world, and that the disorder entails suffering, and that not only on the sinner, is a fact of common experience. We also know that the suffering which sin brings has been proved again and again to have a remedial, chastening influence on the offender, and I think we shall scarcely be inclined to deny that such influence is in harmony with the divine will, which orders the world in wisdom and love. But in all this, we are very far from the idea that suffering is penal, in the sense in which a human tribunal may inflict a certain arbitrary penalty for a given crime. There can surely be no room for vengeance or retribution in the dealings of God with man. The highest conception we can form of the function of punishment is, that it is remedial, at least in its intention, meant to bring the offender to a better mind. And can we go beyond the profound saying of Plato, that God

can only punish men with the view of making them better?

4. From the standpoint of the Christian doctrine of God, the popular presentation of the Atonement stands utterly condemned, as involving a contrast between the justice of the Father, and the mercy of the Son. For quite clearly, we thus give up our fundamental belief, in which both Judaism and Christianity are rooted, in one God. As we shall see, the Christian faith in the Holy Trinity, is a belief (i) in the Unity of the Godhead and (ii) in distinctions within that Unity. We cannot compromise the Unity, without sacrificing that which is the foundation of all true religion, and the tacit assumption of science, and, as the writer would urge, of sound philosophy. If the world be an organic unity, its source must be one. To separate between the Father and the Son morally, as is done by this theory of the Atonement, is to assert the existence of two Gods at least, or else to make the Son more than man and less than God, and, in our modern world, such a return to heathenism or Arianism is unthinkable. It is scarcely necessary to say, what has been said so often, that not the slightest warrant for the distinction between the justice of the one, and the mercy of the other, can be found in the New Testament. Sin provokes the 'wrath' of the Son as of the Father (*Rev.* vi. 16), and the Cross exhibits the self-sacrifice of the Father (*S. John* iii. 16; 1 *S. John* iv. 9), no less than of the Son, for Father and Son are one (*S. John* x. 30).

Thus this popular idea of the Atonement, of pardon wrung from the Father by the suffering and death of His innocent Son for the guilty, is opposed alike by morality, by the Christian idea of God, or,

we might add, by any rational idea of Him, and by the clear and emphatic teaching of the New Testament. It is a good thing to have got rid of a view which has been, and in some quarters still is, a serious stumbling-block and obstacle to belief, before we consider what Atonement, or reconciliation to God, really means, and what is the connection between this and the death of Christ.

(i) I think we can best begin by thinking of the death of Christ as an historical fact, and, as such, having its place in that natural sequence of events which make up human history. To recognize that that history is a chain of effects and causes is not necessarily to commit ourselves to a mechanical view which would exclude free will; while to refuse to recognize it as such, would be to reduce it to a mere unconnected jumble of facts, incapable of any explanation. Christ died, because His teaching and His life aroused such intense opposition, as was bound to happen under the circumstances of His time and place in the world's history, that the hatred which He excited could be satisfied with nothing less than His death. And the manner of His death, on a cross, was equally the natural result which followed from His being a provincial under the Roman government. A very slight sketch will show the truth of these statements. (*a*) At the outset of His ministry He had been extremely popular with the crowd. There is no doubt that the proclamation, 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand,' aroused in many minds the wild hopes of a great national deliverance to be effected by the chosen of God, the Messiah. Such hopes, we know from the literature of the times, were in the air, and in no place were they more likely to be excited than in

Galilee, the seat of more than one rising. Most significant, in this connection, is the statement in S. John's Gospel of His enforced retreat after the feeding of the five thousand. 'Jesus, therefore, knowing that they are about to come and seize Him, in order to make Him a king, withdrew again to the mountain Himself alone' (*S. John* vi. 15). These hopes, as we all know, were disappointed, for His conception of Messiahship was entirely different, not only from that of the crowds, but also from that of those who were His most intimate friends. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in His recorded rebuke of S. Peter, 'Get thee behind me, Satan, for thy thoughts are not those of God, but of men' (*S. Mark* viii. 33). From this passage, by the way, we learn that our Lord's mind was occupied with the idea of a suffering Messiah, and how alien was this idea to the minds of His contemporaries. And the popular disappointment turned finally into contempt and dislike. (*b*) He aroused the opposition of the Pharisees, the leaders of the religious world, by the attitude He took up, both in His teaching and His actions, towards their 'tradition,' the 'fence' of minute rules surrounding the law, in order to prevent the least infraction of its letter. Nay more, He dared quite freely to criticize the law itself, penetrating to the spiritual principles which lay beneath, and were sometimes obscured by the literal enactment. This conflict is most clearly set out in S. Mark's Gospel, where we are able to follow its stages. Nothing could show more impressively the intensity of the hatred the new Teacher had created, than the unholy alliance of the Pharisees, the champions of strict Judaism (cp. S. Paul's description, *Acts* xxvi. 5), with the party attached to Herod Antipas. 'The

Pharisees took counsel with the Herodians against Him, in order to destroy Him' (*S. Mark* iii. 6; cp. xii. 13). His death was now resolved upon. (*c*) It was one thing to meditate the destruction of Jesus, and to intrigue to that end; another, and one demanding more resolute action, to carry the idea into effect. This was reserved for the high ecclesiastics of Jerusalem, the Sadducees (cp. *Acts* v. 17, 'the high priest and all his following, which is the sect of the Sadducees'). Our Lord knew what awaited Him, when He set out for the final visit to Jerusalem (*S. Mark* x. 32–34). The hostility of the high priestly party was aroused (1) by their dread of the political consequences of a Messianic rising, leading inevitably to Roman intervention, the loss of their own considerable power, and a still further loss of what freedom the Jewish State was allowed to retain (*S. John* xi. 49, 50). (2) By their resentment at the interference with their very profitable trade carried on in the 'court of the Gentiles.' When Jesus 'cleansed the Temple' He was dealing, for the time, a heavy blow at the incomes of the high priest and his relations. The stalls at which the victims were sold were known as 'the booths of the sons of Hanan,' that is, Annas, late high priest, and father-in-law to his successor, Caiaphas (*S. John* xviii. 13). Exorbitant profits were made, and unfair advantage taken of the pilgrims, who bought their victims, and had their foreign money changed into shekels of the sanctuary. So there was point and sting in our Lord's quotation of Jeremiah's words 'a den of robbers' (*S. Mark* xi. 17). Our Lord's death was determined finally by the energetic action of the hierarchy. (*d*) Pilate might have saved Him, it is implied. But it needed

a stronger man, with a cleaner record. It was the teaching of the kingdom that formed the foundation of the fatal charge, of 'making Himself King' (*S. John* xix. 12). In a disaffected district like Judaea, disloyality to Caesar must be stamped out. We need not speak of other factors, of Herod, or of Judas. Our purpose has been to show that the death of Christ was the perfectly natural and inevitable result of two factors: (1) His teaching and life, and (2) the feelings, interests, passions of the men among whom that teaching was given and that life lived. He being what He was, and they being what they were, no other issue was possible.

(ii) We may regard the same series of events from a different angle. Christ's death was due to the unswerving courage with which He followed the line of action which He had marked out for Himself, as early, it would appear, as the temptation in the wilderness. That story describes in pictorial form a spiritual experience of struggle, which He passed through at the outset of His ministry. I think we may feel confident that the form in which we possess it, is due to Christ Himself. It is entirely in His manner, to clothe realities of the spiritual life in the garb of a striking story. What is certain is, that we can, without difficulty, discover therein the principles which governed His action, from the first preaching of the kingdom in Galilee to the last visit to Jerusalem which culminated in the Crucifixion. His powers, and the whole narrative implies the conscious possession of extraordinary powers, were never used for personal ends: He steadily refused to 'work a sign' to convince those unconvinced by the teaching, or to overpower men's minds by the display of supernatural phenomena, to win assent by other

means than the appeal to reason and conscience: He once for all resolutely and even passionately declined the role of a political Messiah, one who would gain the world for the kingdom of God by the world's methods and not in God's way. For a recurrence of the second and third temptations in the course of the ministry, see S. Mark viii. 11 (request of the Pharisees for 'a sign from heaven'), viii. 33 (rebuke to S. Peter). Soon, or it may be from the outset, it became clear that God's way was that of suffering and death. This was increasingly manifest in the ever deepening hostility of the Pharisees, and the desertion of many of His followers (*S. John* vi. 66). From the crisis of the ministry, marked by the Messianic confession of S. Peter, He sets Himself to prepare the Apostles for the inevitable end (*S. Mark* viii. 31). His rejection and death, He clearly foresaw, was involved in doing the Father's work in the Father's way. This is a very different thing from saying, as some have said recently, that He deliberately sought death. There is no trace of such an idea, which is definitely contradicted by recorded sayings on the eve of the Passion. 'Take away this cup from Me—nevertheless not what I will but what Thou [willest] be done' (*S. Mark* xiv. 36). 'The cup which the Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?' (*S. John* xviii. 11). Such words ring true: they are in harmony with all we learn of the mind of Christ from other places in the Gospels, and all we can infer from the actual course of the ministry. We may say that His death was anticipated indeed by Himself, but as the result of perfect obedience to the Father and the faithful carrying out of His mission, in a disobedient and sinful world. Nor would it

be right to speak of His death as willed by the Father, except in a similar sense, that such a work in such a world did mean, in the end, the rejection and death of the Messenger. Only in this sense could He be said to be 'delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God.' The willing and the execution of the plan to 'destroy Him' was the act of wicked men, not of God (*Acts* ii. 23). 'He became obedient unto death, and that the death of the Cross,' is the way in which S. Paul sums up the matter (*Phil.* ii. 8). The perfect obedience in a disobedient world must be 'unto death.'

(iii) We may generalize the situation. In any place and at any time, the issue of the sinless life lived among sinful men, would have been similar. For sin is in the last resort not mere absence of good but hatred of good. And when the good is seen in its absolute perfection, we can understand that evil would appear over against it in its blackest form, and in most intense and violent opposition. Here we have left the ground of history, and see in the death of Christ the supreme illustration of a fact in the spiritual world, that sin is really the rejection and hatred of God. The tragedy of the Cross is ever being re-enacted, both in the persecution of good men, and in the stifling or killing of the better nature in the man himself. The Cross brings this fact out into the full light of day, in an historical setting where the eyes of all men are directed upon it. It is the revelation of the true nature of sin, in its malignity and hatred of good.

(iv) The Cross cannot be separated from its sequel in the Resurrection, Ascension, the coming of the Spirit, and the creation of the Fellowship. The point now is this—that if we are seeking to

understand the Cross, not simply as an historical fact, but in regard to the place which it occupies in Christian teaching, as part of the process by which God reconciles man to Himself, and welcomes him as an adopted son in the holy fellowship of love, we cannot regard it in isolation either from the ministry which preceded it, or from the events which followed it. So we find our Lord Himself looking beyond the Cross. He lays down His life voluntarily, as 'a ransom for many' (*S. Mark* x. 45). That is the supreme service which He renders men by His death. The language recalls the picture of the suffering servant of the Lord in Isaiah liii. And surely the 'ransom' must be nothing else than the deliverance of men from the grip and thraldom of evil. He speaks, in the institution of the Eucharist, of His 'Blood (i.e. His freely offered life) of the covenant' (*S. Mark* xiv. 24) or 'The new covenant in His Blood.' Once again, the words lead back to the Old Testament, to the great inaugural covenant by which Israel became the people of God, described in Exodus xxiv. There, the blood of the victims, sprinkled both upon the altar and the people, stood for a new relation, a new fellowship with God into which Israel was admitted. So here, the act by which Christ voluntarily surrenders His life, in the spirit of perfect obedience and love, was the inauguration of a new people of God, the foundation of a new relation and fellowship of obedience and love into which men were to be brought both with God and each other. The same lesson, under quite a different figure, is taught in one of those nature parables in which our Lord delighted, in S. John xii. 24: 'Verily I say unto you, except the grain of corn, when it falls

into the earth, die, it abides alone and barren; but if it die, it bears much fruit.'

It is of considerable importance to note, that the aspect of the Cross as at-one-ment, as reconciliation with God, is found in the recorded words of Christ, words the genuineness of which it would be in the highest degree arbitrary to question on this account. Here is the basis of the teaching on the Atonement in S. Paul, Hebrews, and S. John. As we are not writing a treatise on the Atonement, but only feeling our way towards a rational statement of it, it will be sufficient to bring together our various threads and see if a consistent whole emerges. We can then add a word on the characteristic teaching of Hebrews.

(*a*) We are led to think of one great act of God, for which all previous history was the preparation. Because God entered into space and time, the one act is seen by us in different stages, the Incarnation, the Ministry, the Cross, the Resurrection and Ascension, the coming of the Spirit, the holy Fellowship. All stages may be brought within the compass of S. Paul's phrase: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself' (2 *Cor.* v. 19). It was the entry of God into human life—from which indeed He had never been absent, but His entry in a special sense, to accomplish the end of man's being, by lifting him up into the eternal life of God, the life of perfect goodness and love. This is man's at-one-ment with God.

(*b*) The Cross is a stage, as we see it, in this great act of God. In order that man might be brought into that fellowship with God and his brother men, which is life eternal, he must first be set free from the one thing which hinders and finally destroys the possibility of such fellowship. That is, all that

is contrary, in man, to the divine righteousness and love, and which is called, significantly, by a word in the New Testament we translate 'sin,' which means 'missing the mark.' We need enter into no long discussion on this point. We are too well acquainted with moral evil and the havoc which it causes. All sorts of theories have centred round the existence and definition of sin. We take it here as a fact of common experience, only adding, what seems to need no argument, that it is the one obstacle to that union with God, which is life eternal, and must rest on moral likeness. The Cross means that God in Christ faced moral evil as a practical working force in the world. He faced it and in our manhood overcame it, not by force but by suffering. By submitting to all sinful men could do, sooner than yield in His obedience, He introduced a new type of manhood. In the Resurrection and Ascension He showed that new type victorious over every hostile power, and enthroned as the central force in the world's history. In the coming of the Spirit He brought into being the holy Fellowship, one by sharing in that new life, one in practical exhibition of the Spirit's working, one in the life of service and love to God and man. So as men are being gathered into the Fellowship (in spite of all the imperfection and disunion which the present embodiment of the Fellowship presents) the great act of God's reconciliation of mankind to Himself in Christ still marches forward to a consummation beyond our limited powers of imagination, 'the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He foreordained in Him, to sum up all things in Christ' (*Eph.* i. 9–11).

All hangs together. The Cross is seen to be a

necessary stage in the process of Atonement. Unless God were to win the victory over evil by force, which would have been no victory at all, the divine conquest must be a costly one. It must involve the uttermost self-sacrifice of God in our manhood. In no other way could the new type of manhood be created.

It becomes easy to see how the Cross is connected with the pardon of the individual, for the link between him and it is that faith, or enthusiastic adhesion to Christ, by which he becomes more and more identified with all Christ is and represents in His death and resurrection, dying with Christ to sin, and rising with Him to newness of life (*Rom.* vi. 1–11).

Nor is there any moral or fictitious imputation of merit. For the believer is being raised by faith into a closer moral union with Christ, individually, while, within the Fellowship, he shares, through the sacraments of the Fellowship, in the one life of Him Who died and rose again.

Finally, the sacrificial aspect of the Cross would never have been the stumbling-block which it has in fact been, if we had not clung to what is now known to be a late and debased conception of sacrifice, as a gift to turn away the anger of an offended deity. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews represents the relation of Christ's Sacrifice to those of the Jews, and we might include those of the heathen world, very much in the same way as that in which the Gospels represent His relation to the law. He both abolished and fulfilled them, for the Cross perfectly fulfils that which is the heart and essence of all sacrifice, the offering, through whatever material embodiment, of the human will in utter devotion to God. 'By

which will we have been sanctified, through the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once for all' (*Heb.* x. 9). It is this which, as the offering of the mystical Body of Christ, the holy Fellowship, is represented in every Eucharist. 'Here (in union with His perfect self-oblation thus set forth) we offer and present ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto Thee.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE HOLY TRINITY

THERE is no doubt that to many sincere Christians, the doctrine of the Trinity presents a serious intellectual stumbling-block. Many more in despair have given up thinking about it at all, and have relegated it to an obscure, unvisited chamber of their minds, being quite content to practise their religion without what they consider an unintelligible and needless addition. In so thinking, they are wrong. 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,' is the new and distinctively Christian name of God, and, as such, sums up in the shortest form, the Christian Creed, on which the Christian life, as well as Christian worship, is founded. As is usually the case, the difficulty has been much exaggerated by reason of misunderstanding, which in turn is often due to imperfect teaching.

The clue to a better understanding and therefore a more intelligent belief, is to be found by trying to answer the question, What is the origin of the doctrine? And here, in the first place, it is most important to note that it did not arise as a theory or speculation about the being of God. No thinker or series of thinkers invented the doctrine itself, as distinct from the later, elaborated statement of it. It grew up as a natural growth, the inevitable result of the spiritual experience of the first generation of disciples of our Lord.

Consider what that experience was, in its gradual development. The Apostles were brought into close companionship and ever growing intimacy with Jesus of Nazareth. In that consisted the first and most necessary stage of their training. 'He appointed twelve in order that they might be with Him.' Doubtless He was to them, at the first, a teacher, a Rabbi as one of the Rabbis, and as such they followed Him, learnt from Him, saw His 'works,' observed His manner of life. As a result, they found that their views of Him were insensibly heightened. At length arrived the crisis of the ministry, when He could put to them the crucial question 'Whom say ye that I am?' This was the test of the result of His intensive training of these selected disciples. S. Peter, as their spokesman, possibly also giving expression to what in the minds of his fellow Apostles was a vague, scarcely formulated belief, utters the decisive words 'Thou art the Christ' (*S. Mark* viii. 29). It was an enormous advance on the Rabbi stage of belief, and probably an intervening stage had been that reached already by some, or many, of the outer circle of the disciples: 'Elijah, or one of the prophets.' How great was the advance, how critical the step taken, is shown by the words recorded in S. Matthew, so obviously genuine, in their expression of relief and even of triumph: 'Blessed art thou, Simon son of John, because flesh and blood did not reveal it to thee, but My Father Who is in heaven' (*S. Matt.* xvi. 17). For us the question to be answered, if possible, is what was exactly involved in the confession of our Lord's Messiahship? There was but little doubt that at any rate two connected ideas were included: first, that He was the expected One, far greater than any

prophet, for the prophets had pointed to Him, the Hope of Israel; and, secondly, that as such He was the anointed King, the predestined deliverer of the nation. This idea of royalty was perhaps the primary one. It was closely connected with our Lord's preaching of the kingdom of God, and how great a place it occupied in the minds of the Apostles is shown by their question, just before the Ascension, 'Lord, dost Thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?' (*Acts* i. 6). It was, at the same time, a highly dangerous idea, quite capable of causing an explosion of popular feeling, and of entirely wrecking our Lord's work. Hence the injunction to secrecy which immediately followed S. Peter's confession (*S. Mark* viii. 30); hence the attempt, frustrated by our Lord's withdrawal, to seize His Person and make Him a King (*S. John* vi. 15); hence the charge, on which He was actually condemned and crucified, of 'making Himself a King' (*S. John* xix. 12), of 'saying that He Himself is Christ, a King' (*S. Luke* xxiii. 5, cp. the superscription on the Cross). It is another, and a very difficult question, whether the Christ or Messiah was considered, in the Apostolic circle at this time, as a superhuman being. Into the complicated problem of what the Jews at different times, and in their various schools, really believed about the Messiah, it is impossible here to enter. Reference may be made to Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, pp. 289 sqq., or to Stanton's *The Jewish and the Christian Messiah*, especially pp. 146 sqq. I think we may safely say that while, in S. Peter's confession, there is included, as always, the conception of a very special, intimate relation to the God of Israel, as the anointed King of His people, there is not present

the further idea that the Messiah is more than human, or existed before His advent on earth. It is this relationship, expressed in Old Testament language, which is indicated by the expanded form of the confession in S. Matthew, 'the Christ, the Son of the living God' (*S. Matt.* xvi. 16). The King of God's people may well be entitled His Son, as in Psalm ii. 7, just as the whole nation, whose representative He is, bears that name (*Hosea* xi. 1).

The confession of S. Peter, as remarked above, marks the crisis of our Lord's ministry. The training of the Twelve has, so far, attained its purpose. Now, from this point onwards, the main current which underlies His thoughts and words and acts, is the preparation for His Passion. Already, immediately after the great confession, the note is struck: 'He began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things' (*S. Mark* viii. 31 ff.); and, finally, He turns His face, for the last time, towards Jerusalem. 'They were in the way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them, and they were filled with awe, and as they followed they were afraid, and taking aside again the Twelve, He began to speak to them of the things which were to befall Him . . .' (*S. Mark* x. 32).

In the Apostles' minds, as we can see, the contradiction was complete, between the Messiahship of their Master, and His suffering at the hands of men. So fully occupied were they with the former idea, that the latter, in spite of His three times repeated prediction, remained perfectly unintelligible. An interesting reflection of the thoughts of disciples not actually in the inner circle, but apparently connected rather closely therewith, is to

be found in S. Luke xxiv. 21, 'We hoped that this was He Who was to deliver Israel.'

The Resurrection made all the difference, not only in regard to the present, but to their reading of the past. For now the question arose, Who was this Messiah, the King Who by suffering redeems His people (cp. *S. Luke* xxiv. 26, 46, with *S. Mark* x. 45) and over whom death has no power? It was given, if we may follow S. John, to the sceptic among the Apostles, to S. Thomas, to express first the full faith attained later by the Church as a whole: 'Thomas saith unto Him, My Lord and my God' (*S. John* xx. 28).

As has been already remarked, there were various views among the Jews, within certain wide limits, as to the nature and work of the Messiah. The conception was not defined with scientific accuracy. And the events which followed the Passion, the Resurrection and Ascension and the coming of the Spirit, must have made the Apostles realize far more than they could have done at the time, what was involved in the earlier acknowledgement of the Messiahship of their Master. Further, their meaning and their understanding of His words were, we are given to believe, quickened and enlightened by the Spirit (*S. John* xiv. 26). Thus, their ideas of Him must have been largely moulded by their recollection of such sayings as this: 'All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no man knoweth the Son save the Father, nor doth any man know the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son shall will to reveal Him. Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in

heart, and ye shall find refreshment for your souls. For My yoke is kindly and My burden light' (*S. Matt.* xi. 27–30; cp. *S. Luke* x. 22). They would recall His claim on their absolute devotion (*S. Matt.* x. 37 and other passages), the stress He laid on the confession of His Name (*S. Matt.* x. 32, 33), His dealing with the sacred law (*ibid.*, v. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44, 'I say unto you'), His assertion that He, as Son of man, would come in glory as the Judge of all men (e.g. *S. Matt.* xxv. 31 ff.).

Besides all this, there was what we cannot now recover, and can only discern by its effects, namely, the total impression produced on their minds by His Personality.

It is worth while to observe, by the way, that what we have in the Gospels (and the same is true, to a real extent, of the early speeches in the Acts) is not 'a theology of the Person of Christ,' but only the material for such a theology. The absence of theological terms and ideas from the Synoptic Gospels, such as we know were current in Christian circles at the time when they were written, has been often and justly noted as a striking proof of the fidelity with which they preserve the thoughts and feelings and experiences of the first generation of disciples, and, therefore, of the genuineness of the tradition which they embody.

The most highly developed Christian theology is but the formulation of the spiritual experience of these earliest disciples. How far, we may ask, did they themselves get in the attempt, which as rational beings they were bound to make, to give a reasoned expression of what Jesus meant to them and to men? The most general answer which we get from the New Testament, would seem to be this: He stands

in a relation to God—to Jehovah—whom He reveals as Father—which no man can share with Him. It is this germinal Christian conviction which underlies the wonderful theologizing of S. Paul and S. John. Nothing is more striking than the fact that in his earliest Epistle, written about A.D. 50, S. Paul, a strict monotheist, can address a prayer to Jesus coupled with the One Supreme God: 'May God Himself, even our Father, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you' (1 *Thess.* iii. 11). Hardly less striking, in view of its use in the Greek Old Testament to translate the sacred name Jehovah, and its application to deities in the Graeco-Roman world of the day, is the constant attribution to Him of the title 'Lord.' All later developments are contained here—the magnificent conception in Colossians and Ephesians of the function of Christ in creation as its Agent, its Sustainer, and its Goal; and the teaching of the prologue of S. John's Gospel about the eternal Word, Who is God, and with God, by whom all things were made, Who is the Life of all that live, the Light of reason and conscience in men. All such thoughts are but the expression of the earliest Christian creeds, 'I believe Jesus is Lord' (*Rom.* x. 9), 'I believe Jesus is the Son of God' (1 *S. John* iv. 15, cp. the early interpolation, *Acts* viii. 37), or, in the fuller Christian sense, 'I believe Jesus is the Christ' (1 *S. John* v. 1).

We sum up this primitive faith in some such way as this: Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, in a sense in which we are not, nor can any man be: we, in Him, are made sons, but our sonship is derived from Him (cp. *S. John* i. 12). As such, He perfectly reveals the Father (*S. John* xiv. 9). He is the Lord and the Master; we rejoice, and we find

our freedom, in being His slaves (cp. *Gal.* v. 1). This belief was held along with (i) the knowledge of His real humanity, (ii) the ancient Jewish belief in the One God.

It is of vital importance to consider whether we have, in all this, an example of ' deification,' raising a departed hero to a region above mere humanity. There are two conclusive reasons for rejecting this: (i) the Christian belief about Jesus is so obviously an attempt to put into words what was already contained in their experience of Him as He lived with them. There is evolution in the sense of expanding what existed in the original germ, not in the sense of addition from outside. (ii) The whole atmosphere of the Jewish world, in which Christianity grew up, is absolutely inconsistent with deification. This cannot be expressed too strongly. No Jew could have had anything to do with the idea of a deified man. The Christian Creed was already the possession of the Christian Church before it came into contact with that outside world in which such a conception was possible. And from what we can trace, when influences from this wider world of Graeco-Roman and Oriental thought did begin to act upon Christian beliefs they did so in the two main directions, both opposed to deification, of (i) a denial of the humanity of our Lord and (ii) the lowering, not heightening, of the conception of His nature, so as to make Him one of many intermediaries between God and His creation. Jesus is thus believed on as the Son, in a unique sense. At the same time the belief in the unity of God is undisturbed. No attempt is made to harmonize the two ideas, because, apparently, no contradiction is felt. Here, then, is the foundation, in the sphere

of the intellect, of what we have seen to be the heart of what their religion meant, to the members of the Christian fellowship, their faith, with all that included of adoration, of enthusiastic adherence and loyality, to the Risen and Ascended Lord. Christianity was, essentially, a life to be lived, 'the way' (*Acts* v. 20; ix. 2). Like all kinds of human life, it rested upon certain intellectual presuppositions. But the time for examining these, of reconciling them with other beliefs, had not yet come. Life always comes before theory.

But that life, as we also saw, was one lived in the power of the Spirit. Not less characteristic of the mental outfit of these earliest Christians than their belief in the heavenly Lord, was their belief, or, even more truly, their intense experience of the activity in their midst, of the Spirit, outpoured by the Christ, as the Creator and Sustainer of the fellowship and the Source of the new life in the individual. It is not our task here to trace the origin of this conception. A most valuable exposition of its earlier stages may be found in Irving Wood's *The Spirit of God in Biblical Literature.* It will be sufficient here to note the association of the Spirit with prophecy, and the expectation of a special manifestation of the Spirit in the days of the Messiah (cp. the famous passage in *Joel* ii. 28–32, quoted by S. Peter on the day of Pentecost, *Acts* ii. 17–21). It would, however, be a great mistake to think of the first disciples as primarily influenced by literature, however sacred or familiar, and however deeply inwrought into their mental constitution. The past gave to them the power of expressing their new experience, and correlating it with other experiences.

But the point to notice is the novelty of the experience. Within the Christian fellowship they found themselves possessed by a new life, with new powers of self-control, of self-sacrifice, of faith, and hope, and love, a veritable recreation of human life, such as the world had never before seen. The wonderful literature of our New Testament is in part the witness to, in part itself the natural and spontaneous expression of, the new thing which had come into the world. And this experience of theirs, so real as to make everything else seem by comparison unsubstantial, they referred back to the promise of Christ that He would send upon believers in Him the Holy Spirit, the 'power from on high' (cp. *Acts* i. 8), the promise of which they heard from those to whom it was made, of which their successors were to read in the writings of S. Luke and S. John. When they spoke or wrote to each other of the Author of this wonderful change which they felt in themselves, and of which they saw evidences all round them in the lives of their fellow Christians, it was scarcely possible not to use language which implied that they had to deal not with a force, or an emanation, but with a Person (cp. for example *Acts* v, 3; *Rom.* viii. 16; *Eph.* iv. 30). Again, as in the case of the Son of God, difficulties might arise in harmonizing the expression of the new experience with earlier beliefs. What was the exact relation of the Spirit to the One God of their ancestral belief, or to the glorified Christ? Such questions had to be discussed, but the time for their discussion was not yet.

The great point to notice is, that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity has its root in a real spiritual experience, first of the Apostles of the Lord Jesus, then

of the members of the Christian fellowship. The God of their fathers gradually, in that experience, assumed a threefold character. Already the new name is heard (*S. Matt.* xxviii. 19), 'baptizing them into the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.' If this, or something like this, had never been spoken by Christ it would seem difficult to account for the distinctively trinitarian language which meets us later: 'Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father' (*Gal.* iv. 6). 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' (2 *Cor.* xiii. 14). 'Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ' (1 *S. Peter* i. 2). Here, then, we have the earliest attempts to put into language (language, it is probable, moulded by some words of our Lord) the new thing which had come into humanity, the spiritual experience of the first disciples of Christ.

But in no long time the Christian Church found itself involved in all the great currents of life and thought which prevailed in the Graeco-Roman world. All sorts of interpretations were put upon her doctrines, some of which appeared to contradict the essential faith which she had received from the Apostles, including, of course, the Christian idea of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And thus, perforce, and against her will, the Church had to embark on the perilous and unprofitable task of definition. Such definitions could only be made by use of the words and thoughts current in that particular age. So we at last meet with such terms as 'substance,' 'essence, 'person.' We have to bear

certain principles very carefully in mind: (1) Definition, as we remarked, was forced upon the Church from outside, a task undertaken not willingly but in order to exclude views felt to be strange and alien from her spiritual experience. (2) No definition of the Reality which lay behind that experience claims or can claim to be its adequate expression. The utmost that can be claimed for it is, that it serves to guard against some more or less obvious misinterpretation, that is, to state what the truth is not, rather than what it is. (3) Terms change their meanings. The word 'person' is an instance of this. As applied to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it quite certainly did not convey the idea of separateness, of mutual exclusiveness, which it has for modern ears. To understand it in its present sense in this connection, would be tritheism, the belief in three Gods, one of the errors which the Church was most desirous to exclude. And to fix the exact meanings of 'substance' and 'essence' requires some acquaintance with the philosophy of the period. (4) Once more we repeat that the essential thing was, and is, the experience of the disciples who through the Son had come to know the Father and who were conscious of the new powers working in them through the Spirit.

While we recognize the inadequacy of any definition, and the fact that all expressions of Eternal Truth must bear the marks of the age which produced them, we may yet be thankful that the attempt was made, for it has performed the purpose, which it was intended to fulfil, in excluding certain wild vagaries of thought; it has guarded the Faith (which is not to be identified with the definitions of it) for future ages, and thus we may recognize the guiding

of the Holy Spirit in the considered judgements of the Church. A different question is, How are we to explain the doctrine to ourselves? In view of the change in the meaning of terms, and in view of the further fact, that the whole cast of our thought is so far removed from that of the men of the fourth century, what interpretation can we put upon it? A final statement is beyond our powers, that is, one that shall be absolutely valid for all time. That, by the way, is the grand obstacle in the way of all attempts to restate Christian doctrine. There is nothing particularly sacred about 'modern thought.' What is meant, is simply the thought of the twentieth century, which, for all we know, may be quite obsolete in the twenty-first. Further, any sort of statement of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity must be inadequate, must be symbolic of a Reality which will ever elude us. An expression of the Being of God such as should be wholly within our powers of comprehension, would be, by that very fact, condemned as untrue, and not merely inadequate. No created intelligence can comprehend, can hold within its grasp, the nature of the Uncreated. For that would imply that we who comprehend were on the same plane of being as the fact comprehended. The life of God must ever be beyond the reach of our thought. But any serious effort to apprehend Him Who is the Source of all our thought, may well bring some new insight into the truth, if it endeavours to be loyal to the original experience of the Apostles, which still lives on in the experience of the Body of the Christ, and finds real if inadequate expression (and, we repeat once more, all expressions of the ultimate Reality must needs be inadequate) in the Creeds of the Apostolic Church.

1. My own impression, whatever it is worth, is that we may best begin from the idea of revelation. God the Father we can think of as God transcendent, 'dwelling in the Light unapproachable, whom no man hath seen, nor can see' (1 *Tim.* vi. 16). He is, so to speak, God as He is in Himself, unknowable, until He shall reveal Himself. God the Son, or the Word of the Father, is God coming forth in revelation, through nature, through inspired men, and finally through the Incarnation. God the Spirit is God as the indwelling life of nature, as the rational power in thinking men, as the sanctity in the souls of the saints: as the giver of all life, physical, intellectual, spiritual, which is in fact not a gift from outside, but His own presence in all that lives in all the vast range and endless variety of life in the universe. God transcendent, God revealing Himself, God indwelling, there is the Holy Trinity from our point of view, God as He has willed to enter within the sphere of created intelligence on this planet, and so become the Object of their thought.

2. But there is more in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity than this, for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are more than aspects in which the One God appears to us. Somehow, these terms stand for what must ever elude our comprehension, though we can reach out towards a better apprehension of the truth. For they represent eternal distinctions which subsist, independently of our thought of them, within His own eternal Being. Now here we have a most valuable addition to our thought of God. We were entangled, in our thinking of God as a Person, in the difficulty that such an idea seems to make Him but one of many, a member of the society of innumerable persons in the universe. The doctrine

of the Trinity offers an escape from this difficulty. The Divine Life is not the life of a unit, however exalted, but of a Society which perfectly realizes the ideal of fellowship, a unity which includes differences in an absolutely complete and self-sufficing and harmonious whole. There, in a region beyond our thought, which can only work by dividing, the problem of reconciling the one and the many has its eternal solution. But that life is a rich and living and ever active fellowship, and all true fellowship on earth has here its source and its ideal. And the divine activity is the principle of love in the hearts of men. To be in union with God, is to love, as S. John is always teaching. There is no sort of union possible with Him, that does not involve some attempt to realize the ideal of communion among men. And, in fact, we may truly say, that the doctrine of the Trinity is simply the statement, in other terms, of the basal Creed 'God is love,' love in Himself, independently of the universe, which is the expression of the Divine Love under the forms of space and time, and is meant, ultimately, to reflect that love in its every part, when 'God shall be all in all.' Here, on earth, the Christian fellowship, when it is perfected, when the kingdom shall have come, will be the reflection in humanity of that communion in love which is the life of God Himself, the ultimate Reality most truly, but inadequately, expressed in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

CHAPTER IX

THE QUESTION OF EVIL. CONCLUSION

THERE are other problems which the Christian faith presents or suggests. I shall deal now with only one of these, the existence of evil. Then I shall try to deal with the question how far this and the other questions such as those which we have just discussed, are really difficulties in the way of believing.

The existence of evil in the world, whether moral evil, which we call sin, or suffering mental or physical, is felt as a problem which calls for solution, only when we are asked to commit ourselves to a belief in the goodness of God, in particular to the Christian belief in His Fatherhood. Then indeed it begins to press upon our mind with a weight which to some appears wellnigh intolerable. There are, I think, two lines of thought which help, at any rate, to lighten the burden.

1. Sin, in all its varied manifestations, is the rebellion of the will of the creature against the will of the Creator. This is how it appears to the Christian conscience, and it follows, if we accept the argument we have tried to follow, this is the truth about it in all stages of the development of human minds. But it does not follow that the consciousness of this real significance of sin has been or is present at every stage whether of the development of the

race, or of the individual. But we are safe in saying that no act or word or thought can be properly described as sin which does not involve the more or less conscious rejection of what is recognized as the higher or better alternative. There is a light which shines with less or greater radiance within every man (*S. John* i. 9), and S. Paul, with his great breadth of vision, recognizes a true revelation of God where He is not explicitly known or recognized (*Rom.* i. 19).

Now it does not seem that the existence of moral evil in the world presents nearly as much difficulty as is thought sometimes, or, indeed, any difficulty at all, to a believer in the goodness of God. For some freedom of choice is necessary, if man is to be in any sense a moral or spiritual being, or anything else than a soulless automaton. And this, of course, involves the possibility of his choosing wrongly. We must add that it does not involve that man, or any man, must in fact make a wrong choice. Whether God foresaw that the wrong choice would again and again be made, appears to me a perfectly futile question. He at any rate, we may say with reverence, both foresaw and took the risk. And what does it all come to, except that it was His loving will to surround Himself with sons and not with machines? There is and can be no question as to which alternative we can believe more worthy of the divine perfection. One thing at least is certain, that we cannot conceive of His forcing the obedience of the creature, instead of gently leading His son into the path of obedience. 'Force is no attribute of God.' But if sin has in fact 'entered into the world,' these results, we may say, must inevitably follow.

(*a*) Sin cannot be limited to the individual, or to any number of separate individuals. For good and for evil mankind is one. And this old thought of 'the solidarity of the race' has received fresh reinforcement and illumination from what we are now learning from our psychologists about the incalculable power of 'social inheritance.' Here is a new and potent factor of evolution which appears first among human beings, and appears, to some extent at least, to supersede the actions of other factors. Man, and men, are moulded into what they are by the age-long, accumulated social tradition of the common life which they share. And this is the sufficient basis for the Church's doctrine of 'original sin,' though this term for one of the most indubitable facts of our human existence may be open to criticism. 'Our life is a false nature, 'tis not in the harmony of things.' At the same time, we must be careful to maintain that guilt, moral responsibility, can only attach to the wrong choice made by the individual will. What social inheritance would seem to effect, is to make the wrong choice more easy, or more attractive, by means of suggestion, imitation, and the like.

(*b*) But the one thing which would present a most serious difficulty, would be the idea that God was wholly unmoved by a moral disaster on such a world-wide scale, or even by the moral failure of a single individual. Here comes in what has always been felt to be the most signal recommendation of the Christian faith. For the one central fact about Christianity is just this, that it represents a great redemptive act of God, at a real cost to Himself, in order to set men free from the burden and tyranny of sin, and to raise him to his true status as the son

of God. Further, this action of God is represented as continuous, as ever operative in a divine society, with a 'social inheritance,' which is none other than the living Spirit of Jesus, operative in human spirits all down the centuries of Christian history. The human heart recognizes the appeal of love, the appeal to that which is best and highest in itself, 'the wonder of redeeming love, the love of Christ for me.' Some have found a difficulty in the fact that God is thus represented as dealing with a situation which has arisen, as employing ways and means to effect His purpose. The answer is surely that in creating at all, God has truly entered into the world of time and space, and that therefore all these things may be attributed to Him in regard to those relations into which He has willed to enter. We are forced to recognize a self-limitation of God, not only in redemption, but also in creation. Sacrifice, which is the expression of love, is rooted in the divine nature.

(*c*) There is a connection, though we are not able to define its limits, between sin and suffering. For it is obvious that sin, which is the estrangement of man from God, cannot but act on man's whole nature, and on his environment, the world in which he lives. Indeed we are now learning how little a sharp line can be drawn between these two things, the nature of a living being and its environment. It is beyond all doubt that an enormous mass of suffering is due to selfishness and sin, to the thorough disorganization of human life which these things bring in their train. And it is at least probable that this disorganization and consequent suffering extend much farther than direct observation can trace. In other words, we are not dealing with the

world as God made it, but as man has made it. We have never seen the world as He meant it to be. The suffering due to sin, is not an arbitrary infliction from without, not a punishment inflicted by an external lawgiver or judge. It is the natural result of sin, following from the moral and spiritual nature of the universe, which nature is an expression, in time and space, of the perfectly holy nature of God. We cannot lay too much stress on the fact that sin is its own punishment, alike in the moral degradation it brings upon the sinner, and in the widespread disorganization and consequent suffering which it causes. And if we ask why? the answer is to be found not in an arbitrary enactment of God, but in the fact that He is essentially righteous, and that the universe exists not apart from Him, but as, in some sense, His embodiment, revealing in terms of created life His own eternal righteousness, which is Himself. And, equally we may apply a similar explanation of those cases, not few in number, where good has come out of what is at least relatively evil, where suffering has tended to the moral raising and purifying of human life. For not merely has suffering, in some form or other, sometimes produced the moral reformation of a transgressor, but, on a wider scale, some of the finest human characters have been those refined and strengthened in the school of suffering. The vision of God presented by His universe is often dim and obscure, at least to sin-clouded eyes, but sometimes it shines forth with even startling clearness.

2. Is it possible to say that all suffering is to be traced, not of course directly (though we see sometimes a direct connection) but indirectly, to sin? I think what we have said above will lead us to

think that this is true of the great mass of human suffering. I believe that this is no exaggeration. But to lay down a universal statement to this effect, to say that all the suffering of mankind is due to sin, may for all we know be true, but we have no means of verifying such a statement or even of weighing its probability. And if we assume that animal pain is part of the disorganization of the world caused by human sin and that the world will share in man's final deliverance (*Rom.* viii. 19 sqq.), as indeed we may hope, what are we to say about animal suffering before man appeared? Here is a difficulty, even to those who believe, with the present writer, that the pain of the animal world has often been represented in an exaggerated, as it is certain it has been represented in a very one-sided way, that is, without any regard to that side of the picture which is the more impressive, the abounding joy of nature's life. I think it would be unreasonable to assume either that there is no solution, or that we have not the powers necessary to arrive at the true one. The difficulty, and it is well to get our thoughts clear on this point, arises from two presuppositions: (*a*) that God is good, (*b*) that His goodness is inconsistent with His toleration of pain. The first statement is an essential part of Christian belief: that the second follows necessarily from it, is exceedingly doubtful. Biology teaches that pain is a necessary factor in the preservation and development of animal life. The capacity of feeling pain is the result of the appearance of a nervous organization. And apart from this being necessary for any high development of life, the pain, or rather the possibility of pain which it involves, is a factor whose value cannot be exaggerated. For it serves as a danger signal, leading the

animal to avoid what would be destructive to its existence, or to seek relief in beneficial action. It is not otherwise in the case of man. We should often fall victims to disease, if pain did not warn of its approach, and bid us avoid some course of action, or seek for a remedy.

Is it not more than possible, that something like this is true of man's higher development, of his moral and spiritual growth? We have already alluded to the moral effects of pain, and, as all life is one, may we not generalize, and say that it is not an unqualified, unmitigated evil, as it sometimes appears to us who instinctively shrink from it, but that it represents the cost of all advance in life, physical or moral? This is at least what some of the noblest men have felt in regard to themselves.

> And so I live, you see,
> Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
> Prefer, still struggling to effect
> My warfare; happy that I can
> Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
> Not left in God's contempt apart,
> With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
> Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.

This would be indeed, even if there were not (as we shall see) much more to be said, a justification of the ways of God. A world such as we know, in which there lurks the possibility of suffering, in which each forward step is a risk, an adventure, in which progress can only be made at a great cost, is, as far as we can see, the kind of world most fitted for the growth of the embodied spirit into the likeness of God Who is love. For love is inconceivable apart from sacrifice, which is at least the readiness

to suffer. And if man has been evolved out of an animal ancestry, with inherited instincts of self-assertion and self-preservation strongly developed (though this is not the whole story of biological advance), then surely he needs a long education in the refining school of suffering if he is to make progress upon the new plane of spiritual life which now opens before him. Thus what appears at first sight harsh and forbidding in the aspect of that natural system in which man finds himself, conceals from his dim vision a purpose infinitely benignant. So we reach an entirely different presupposition, not indeed that God is indifferent to physical or mental suffering, but that He attaches an unspeakable value to the moral and spiritual life of man, rather than to his physical comfort or freedom from mental disquiet. When we attain to a clearer vision, we may yet thank Him that He has not left us—

> With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
> Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.

3. But, as has been indicated, there is a great deal more to be said, from the Christian point of view. For the central tenet of our faith is this: that God has entered Himself into the time-process, with all it involves. The opposite of the Christian idea of God is that of the deities of Epicurus—

> Who haunt
> The lucid interspace of world and world,
> Where never creeps a cloud, or moves a wind,
> Nor even falls the least white star of snow,
> Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,
> Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar
> Their sacred, everlasting calm.

Accept or reject the creed as we will, its very heart is that the Eternal God has revealed Himself as a 'Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' Jesus is the object of Christian faith and worship, and in Him is the perfect revelation of God in manhood, and, in fact, in suffering manhood. Certainly that manhood is now viewed as exalted in spiritual glory; but that glory has been won by following the common round of human discipline: 'He entered not into glory but first He suffered.' Never can the Christian regard God as a motionless, passionless Absolute, or as a Spectator of the pains of His world. He is, for we cannot limit the revelation of God in Jesus to the short period of the earthly ministry, the Sharer in man's pain and the struggles of his mortal life. He has shouldered our human burden. The Cross represents an eternal fact in the life of God, not, as we have just hinted, merely an historic fact. The Lamb was 'slain from the foundation of the world' (*Rev.* xiii. 8); 'foreordained before the foundation of the world' (1 *S. Peter* i. 20).

There is more in the mystery of the divine love than we can fathom. But at least the instructed Christian can never regard the fact of suffering apart from the Incarnation and the Passion. We realize how largely the central facts of the Creed are forgotten, when we hear the question 'What have I done to deserve this?' Pain is not inflicted on man by an outside God. If, as we saw reason to think, it is involved (or, at least, the possibility of it) in the really beneficent course of life-development, that again is not to be separated from God Who is immanent in it all. The biological and the moral justification of suffering do not exhaust the whole truth about it. The higher truth, glimpses of which we

catch in the life of the Incarnate, is that suffering is not alien from the life of God. He is love, and love is always a costly thing. The divine love is something far other than placid benevolence. And here we have already entered within the limits of the great mystery of vicarious suffering. The innocent suffer for the guilty, and there is some strange efficacy to redeem, and to heal the moral hurts of the guilty, in such purely undeserved suffering. That is sometimes a fact which can be actually observed. The pain or shame which a son's fault has brought to a father, may be the most powerful influence for good in that son's life. Our judgement is apt to go wrong, from our hard and superficial view of human life, as if men were only so many isolated individuals. For good and for evil, we are 'members one of another.' The appeal of the Cross to the human heart has lain in the innocence of the Sufferer, in the very fact that His pain was so utterly undeserved. He was entirely one with us, and He has shown us how that oneness with His brethren gave to His suffering its uplifting power. Vicarious *punishment* is of course utterly unjust and repugnant to the moral sense: vicarious *suffering* is at the heart of the Gospel, and, therefore, at the heart of all that human life of which the Gospel is the highest expression. In some sense, we are called 'to fill up in our turn that which is lacking in the afflictions of the Christ' (*Col.* i. 24).

We cannot leave the problem of suffering without an allusion to the magnificent vision of S. Paul. He reaches out to the thought, the truth of which natural science has established, of the oneness of man with the whole natural order. To his mind, this oneness implies the ultimate deliverance of

nature from all disorder, the sharing of nature itself in the fulfilled redemptive purpose of God. The results of the Incarnation are not to be confined to human life only. Nor indeed can they be, if man is, in the modern phrase, 'organic to nature.' 'The creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (*Rom.* viii. 21). It may well be that S. Paul's spiritual vision has here led him to a truer and profounder philosophy than has hitherto been reached by the intellect alone.

We have been dealing, in this chapter, with what is commonly felt to be the most serious difficulty presented by the Christian faith, a difficulty, indeed, which attaches to any form of theistic belief. But, after all, it is important to remember that the difficulty—and this remark will apply also to some other problems—remains one still, even if we reject theism or Christianity. These only bring it into clearer relief, by challenging us to reconcile it with a belief in the fundamental goodness of the universe. For this latter is what is really at stake. And Christianity differs from other types of religion, by the emphasis it lays on both sides, the reality of evil, and the reality of the goodness and the love of God. It offers, not indeed a complete solution of the problem, but sets over against it the facts of the Cross and the Resurrection. It seems to me, that we have our choice between a pessimistic and an optimistic view of the world, not indeed a thoughtless or easy-going optimism, but one which has the courage to face all the facts of life, and which does open to us a rational prospect of hope. Suffering is indeed the lot of mortal man, but who shall estimate the value of a faith which can look beyond

suffering to the victory of a divine purpose of love, guaranteed not as the result of a more or less doubtful process of reasoning, which may be overthrown by other arguments, but by the historic facts of the suffering and triumph of the Son of God? If we reject that faith, then I fail to see that we have left to us any rational basis of hope. There is no truer, as assuredly there is no more beautiful, description of the Christian faith, than that which represents it as 'a light shining in a dark place' (2 *S. Peter* i. 19).

But the choice, with all its momentous consequences, both in thought and in action, remains for each one to make for himself. I say 'in action,' for the Christian view of the meaning of life must necessarily, if it be sincerely accepted, issue in a quite definite type of conduct. Our actions must be on the whole determined by our general view as to the significance of our individual life, and of that larger life of which it is a part.

The aim of this book has been to show that, on the intellectual side, the difficulties of disbelieving the Christian faith are very much greater than the difficulty of believing it. But the matter is not wholly settled by the appeal to the intellect. No vital matter is ever really settled thus. Consider, for instance, the bewildering variety of opinions in all branches of study which profoundly touch human interests, in psychology, sociology and philosophy. And most of these are supported by quite respectable arguments. Still less, in what affects our life far more nearly than any of these, the truth of the Christian Creed, can we look for an absolutely cogent demonstration. We can indeed be assured that its acceptance involves no sort of sin against the

light of reason. But reason, not the most imposing array of arguments, cannot force that acceptance on us. It cannot be proved in the same sense that a mathematical theorem can be proved. The real grounds of assurance are wider and deeper than any which can be supplied by the intellect alone, which indeed can reach no final certitude on the problems which most vitally affect us. It is the whole man, not his thinking only, who is concerned in the great decision. In the last resort, the issue rests with the will, but not unsupported by the intellect nor uninspired by feeling. And the fact that this choice, so momentous and so hazardous, must be finally a moral one, made by the will, which is really ourselves in the freedom and responsibility which appertain to us as moral agents, as it constitutes the supreme adventure, so is it the glory of our manhood.

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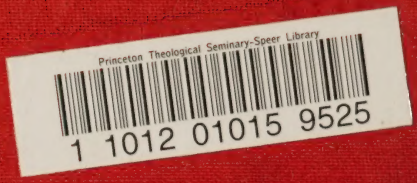
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